THE HIGH PRICE OF THE BP OIL DISASTER

The Nation.

WHAT'S RIGHT WITH ARKANSAS?

MAY 24, 2010
TheNation.com

BILL HALTER'S SENATE CHALLENGE IS REVVING UP RAZORBACK PROGRESSIVES

ARI BERMAN

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Letters

Wounded in Combat, Denied Benefits

Killeen, Tex.
My thanks to Joshua Kors for his truthful reporting on these fraudulent "personality disorder" discharges ["Disposable Soldiers," April 26]. I am happy my story has been told. After the mortar blast, when I reached out and asked for help from my chain of command, I had no idea that my comrades would turn on me. I joined the military to serve like both my grandfathers, to do my part for America. I never thought that this could happen to me.

This article triggered a huge outpouring of support, including e-mails and phone calls from other soldiers who said, "That happened to me."

With the support of my family and friends, I have been able to pull myself up, and I will continue to fight for my brothers and sisters in arms. I will never forget the things that happened to me. To make sure it never happens to anyone else, I have founded Disposable Warriors. We provide support for other soldiers wounded then denied benefits. Since the article was published, we have had more than 200 e-mails and fifty phone calls. I encourage anyone who has had this problem to contact us and keep fighting, because there is hope. I have seen how widespread these personality disorder discharges are. They need to stop. Too many warriors have been wronged.
Sgt. Chuck Luther

California
In 2001 they used the personality disorder discharge on me. I was 19, and my commander said the discharge was my sole way out. I was threatened that if I didn't take that discharge, he would have me thrown out with a dishonorable discharge.

I was having physical medical problems. I should have been honorably discharged. I was verbally assaulted and humiliated. I received threats from fellow enlisted marines and began to fear for my safety. My commander attempted to put me in confinement "for my medical safety." Out of desperation, I tried to kill myself. After the attempt, I was offered the personality disorder discharge. I took the discharge and didn't look back, for a little while at least. I was just so happy to get out of there. Sometime later I began dealing with the experience. Doctors have since confirmed that I do not have a personality disorder.

Even though I have been successful in the days since the discharge, the experience still haunts me. I have told very few people what really happened to me. I feel guilt and shame for the type of discharge I was given. Despite what I know, at some levels I feel that it's my fault. I am too afraid to apply for my dream career in law enforcement because I know they will see my discharge status. Now I wish I had just endured the suffering while I was in the Marines. It has made my life a living hell.
Vincent T.

Simpsonville, S.C.
I was shocked and saddened when I read Joshua Kors's article. I consider myself pretty well informed, but I had never heard of the disgraceful practice of discharging physically wounded soldiers without benefits by claiming they had a pre-existing personality disorder. I was amazed at how Chuck Luther was not only called a liar but treated as a prisoner of war by our own military. I felt that if people knew about this tragic practice they would demand that it be stopped.

That night I started a group on Facebook called Stop Personality Disorder Discharges for Our Wounded Soldiers. The response has been overwhelming. I have been flooded with e-mails from soldiers and families who thought nobody knew or cared about them. Two weeks later, we had more than 2,300 members. We are organizing an e-mail and telephone campaign for Memorial Day, May 31, to let our government know how ashamed we are of this national disgrace. I encourage readers to join the group. I believe we can, and will, stop the use of personality disorder discharges for our wounded soldiers.
Charles Nicholson

letters@thenation.com

(continued on page 24)

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There Will Be Blood

British Petroleum's deepwater well in the Gulf of Mexico is still gushing at least 5,000 barrels of crude oil per day, as it has for two weeks. It could become the biggest oil spill in US history. Along with killing fauna like pelicans and turtles, the oil will destroy the base of the gulf's food chain by killing the larvae and eggs of crabs, clams, oysters, shrimp and fish, devastating the nation's major source of seafood and one of the region's key sources of employment. Like the *Exxon Valdez* disaster, the damage from this spill will last for decades.

EDITORIAL

It is catastrophic, spectacular, heartbreaking—but the BP spill is merely an extreme version of the norm, in which accidents and pollution are routine. In January a tanker collided with two barges at Port Arthur, Texas, dumping 450,000 gallons of oil into the gulf. In Ecuador, Texaco leaked 19 billion gallons of toxic wastewater and 17 million gallons of crude oil in pristine forests. Even on its very best day, our global petroleum economy is a series of violent, toxic horrors. Drilling, shipping, refining and burning oil is killing the planet—at the local level through poisoned air and water, and globally by fueling climate change. Politically the competition for oil breeds conflict and corruption, as it has in the Niger Delta.

The BP disaster, then, is a glimpse of the real price of fossil fuels, and it represents not just an ecological nightmare but a moral crisis—and an opportunity for all who care about the environment to regain the offensive, to put all politicians, including President Obama, on the spot and to demand that we move in a fundamentally new direction. Will we, as a nation, continue to rely on coal mines that collapse, nuclear plants that leak deadly radiation and oil rigs that gush slicks twice the size of Delaware? Or will we make the fundamental change to an economy that uses less energy and develops clean ways to produce it? And if we choose the latter—no foregone conclusion in the face of calls to drill, baby, drill—how, practically, can we make the transformation happen?

In the short term, there's the matter of accountability. BP, of course, should pay for the cleanup, as well as for damages to the region's people and businesses. But under current federal law BP's total liability is capped at just $75 million; Democrats in the Senate are pushing legislation that would raise that cap retroactively to $10 billion.

The BP oil spill, along with the West Virginia mine collapse, are also stark reminders of the deadly consequences of deregulation. Under the Bush administration the US Minerals Management Service (MMS) essentially functioned as an adjunct of the oil industry—many of its top regulators now work as industry lobbyists—gutting or stalling new safety regulations and failing to impose fines in the face of clear violations. But even if MMS had acted with due diligence, the penalties it is able to impose are so tiny that corporate giants like BP, which made $14 billion last year, consider them fractional costs of doing business. There are at least two Congressional inquiries into MMS's lapses, and beyond finger-pointing they should provide the basis for a total overhaul of the government's regulatory role.

Indeed, we need a moratorium on new offshore drilling—on this, at least, Obama should follow Governor Schwarzenegger's lead. And in place of subsidies to oil, coal and nuclear power, we need to make an exponentially greater investment in promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy. There are at least 35,000 wells and more than 7,000 oil platforms in the gulf—but not one offshore wind farm. It is time to invert that ratio.

Page 32: Broadway's *Fela!*

Inside

2 Letters

Editorials & Comment

3 There Will Be Blood

4 The Wrath of the Neocon
JOHN NICHOLS

5 Noted

6 Beyond Business as Usual
JULIET SCHOR

9 Ten Things
What You Can Do for Healthcare Reform

Columns

6 Deadline Poet
On the Gulf Oil Spill
CALVIN TRILLIN

10 The Liberal Media
Party Every Day
ERIC ALTERMAN

Articles

11 What's Right With Arkansas?
Bill Halter's Senate challenge is revving up Razorback progressives.
ARI BERMAN

15 The Push to Isolate Iran
A dirty little secret is that virtually no one thinks sanctions can work as intended.
ROBERT DREYFUSS

18 Central Europe's Right-Wing Populism
The EU's neoliberal economic reforms undermine faith in democratic politics.
PAUL HOCKENOS

22 Needed: A Progressive Story
Progressives need a shared narrative and a shared strategy.
AMITAI ETZIONI

Books & the Arts

25 GREENBERG: Manufacturing Depression: The Secret History of a Modern Disease
ADAM PHILLIPS

28 No Imagination
BARRY SCHWABSKY

32 The Most Happy Fela
FRANKLIN BRUNO

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The Wrath of the Neocon

Dick Cheney has broken former-veep protocol by elbowing an endorsement into the May 18 GOP Kentucky Senate primary between Secretary of State Trey Grayson and Dr. Rand Paul, son of Texas Congressman and presidential hopeful Ron Paul. Indeed, Paul so offends Cheney that the ex–VP hasn't merely blessed Grayson (a former Democrat) as the "true conservative"; he's attacking Paul, a first-time candidate who opened up a lead in the polls early in the campaign, with the sort of language usually reserved for trashing liberal Democrats. "We need senators who truly understand [radical Islam and Al Qaeda] and who will work to strengthen our commitment to a strong national defense and to whom this is not just a political game," gripes Cheney. As if his crabbing weren't enough, former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani is slamming Paul with equal force.

COMMENT

Why is Cheney so upset about a candidate who opposes taxes and spending, is a favorite of the tea party right and even sports a Sarah Palin endorsement? For one thing, Paul is his father's son. Ron Paul's old-right Republicanism, with its disdain for military intervention—including the war in Iraq—and taste for civil liberties, never sat well with the GOP's foreign-policy establishment, as the nasty wrangling between the Congressman and Giuliani during 2007 debates illustrated. The neocons fretted when the elder Paul's presidential bid claimed the national spotlight partly by calling into question their carefully constructed fantasy that only liberal "surrender monkeys" oppose unnecessary wars. Now they're even more worried by the prospect that a GOP senator might apply checks and balances to presidential warmaking.

Rand Paul says, "I would have voted no on the Iraq War." He also says, in a video posted prominently on his campaign website, that he'll push for formal declarations, with House and Senate votes, before the launch even of wars he might favor. He says that while national defense is the top responsibility of government, conservatives who are serious about reducing waste must be wary of the excesses of the military-industrial complex. Add on criticisms of the Patriot Act and a willingness to cross partisan lines, and you can see why Rand Paul gets Cheney's goat.

What really troubles Cheney and his circle, according to the Cato Institute's David Boaz, is the prospect that a Paul win would begin to crack the false facade of party unity on military intervention. "That's an issue the GOP establishment doesn't want an open debate on," says Boaz, who suggests the neocons "desperately fear that [electing] a conservative anti-interventionist leader on foreign policy just might reveal that a lot of Republicans and conservatives…don't buy the world-policeman foreign policy the Bush/Cheney administration imposed on the GOP."

Paul could be joined on this fall's list of GOP Senate candidates by another dissenter from neocon dogma. Former California Representative Tom Campbell is the front-runner in that state's June primary, despite taking a battering from his chief foe, former Hewlett-Packard executive Carly Fiorina, because he once mounted an academic-freedom defense of then–University of South Florida professor Sami Al-Arian, who was under attack for promoting Palestinian causes. More of a libertarian, espe-

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Noted.

ARIZONA BANS ETHNIC STUDIES: The Republican-dominated Arizona legislature has passed a bill that will end ethnic studies classes in the state. The bill bans classes that "promote resentment toward a race or class of people," "are designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group" or "advocate ethnic solidarity instead of treating pupils as individuals." Also prohibited: all those classes that "promote the overthrow of the US government." The legislation applies to public and charter schools, K-12. The bill's author, **Tom Horne**, state superintendent of public instruction, is seeking the Republican nomination for state attorney general.

State Senator **Linda Lopez**, a Democrat from Tucson, who opposed the bill, suggested that it would prohibit teaching about September 11 because that would promote hatred of Muslims. Supporters of the bill somehow rejected that argument. Fox News reported the good news that the bill "does not prohibit the teaching of the Holocaust."

The bill, coming on the heels of Arizona's new immigration law, which authorizes police to demand proof of legal immigration status from anyone in the state, will further help Democrats recruit Latino support, especially for Senators **Barbara Boxer** in California and **Harry Reid** in Nevada, both facing re-election challenges in November. Since 1994, when California voters passed the anti-immigrant **Proposition 187**, Latinos have voted Democratic in overwhelming numbers.

Tens of thousands of people demonstrated across the country on May 1 against Arizona's anti-immigrant legislation. Protesters in seventy cities, including Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas and Washington, chanted, "Shame, shame, Arizona," and carried signs declaring, TODOS SOMOS ARIZONA—"We Are All Arizona."

The ethnic studies bill has been sent to Governor **Jan Brewer** for her signature. She must act on it by May 11. JON WIENER

HOPE IN ARKANSAS: Arkansas is the only state in the former Confederacy that has never elected an African-American to Congress or a statewide office. **Joyce Elliott** hopes to change that shameful history.

Elliott, a state senator from Little Rock, is running for the 2nd Congressional District seat vacated by Democrat **Vic Snyder**, who is retiring. Arkansas is a prime battleground this year, with a heated Senate primary [see "What's Right With Arkansas?" on page 11] and three open Congressional seats. The Senate race has rightly attracted national attention, but so too should Elliott's bid for Congress.

Elliott grew up in the dirt-poor town of Willisville, population 188, and was the first to integrate her local high school in rural southwest Arkansas. "That was ugly," she told me in Little Rock. "There were no soldiers, no cameras." She paid her way through college, taught high school English for thirty-one years and became a leader with the **American Federation of Teachers** before joining the state legislature in 2000.

There, she's been an outspoken progressive, introducing legislation to protect vulnerable minority groups from hate crimes and to allow undocumented immigrants who graduate from high school to be eligible for college scholarships. She knows these controversial stands will be used against her, along with her race. "There are people who are absolutely convinced that it's impossible for me to win because I'm an African-American," she says. "That's based on our history." But, she points out, **Barack Obama** faced many of the same doubts before becoming president. ARI BERMAN

THE FCC WILL LET IT BE: The *Washington Post* reported on May 3 that the **FCC** and its chair, **Julius Genachowski**, are unlikely to reassert their regulatory power over Internet service providers (ISPs). FCC inaction would in effect end the push for "net neutrality," the principle of nondiscrimination against online speech. When and how our messages travel—even what they say—are up to companies like Comcast and AT&T.

The question is whether the Internet is a public infrastructure or the private property of ISPs. Through a declaratory process known as reclassification, the FCC could realign Internet policy with the common-sense understanding that ISPs should not decide what consumers may send or receive. But the FCC's failure to assert its regulatory role leaves us subject to the profit motives or political whims of service providers.

It may seem extreme to think that corporate behemoths like **Comcast** would read our Internet communications, block certain messages and insert their own messages disguised in our voice. Yet such "packet forging" is precisely what Comcast admitted to in a case that was ultimately decided in April by the DC Circuit Court. The FCC had moved to halt the practice. Comcast sued, challenging the agency's authority to stop it—and won.

Without net neutrality, companies like **AT&T** can edit our communications over their wires, similar to the way they censored a 2007 performance by **Pearl Jam**, cutting from the webcast lead singer **Eddie Vedder**'s admonition to President **George W. Bush** to "find yourself another home." The company at first called it a "mistake," then acknowledged that it made a "handful" of similar, surreptitious edits to previous performances by other bands. While unethical, these practices now appear to be perfectly legal—and will continue to be so unless the FCC reasserts its authority. DEEPA FERNANDES

RAZING ARIZONA: Immediate opposition to Arizona's immigration law is spreading from local legislatures to sport venues.

The city councils of **Tucson** and **Flagstaff** voted to sue the state over the law, citing enforcement costs and negative effects on tourism.

While the **Arizona Diamondbacks** and their Republican owner **Ken Kendrick** are booed across the country, the **Phoenix Suns** announced they would wear special "Los Suns" jerseys for their playoff game on Cinco de Mayo. Their opponent, the **San Antonio Spurs**, welcomed the gesture, as did the NBA players union.

The MLB's **Players Association** has condemned the law, mulling "additional steps necessary to protect the rights and interests of our members." High-profile figures like **San Diego Padres** first baseman **Adrián González** and **Chicago White Sox** manager **Ozzie Guillén** are threatening to boycott next year's All Star Game in Phoenix. Twenty-seven percent of the MLB's 833 players are Latinos and 28 percent were born outside the United States. FREDERICK DEKNATEL

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cially on social issues, than Rand Paul, Campbell is a fiscal hawk who takes plenty of traditionally conservative stands. But he also sports a Congressional record of opposing Bill Clinton's Kosovo war, an opposition that included joining liberal Democrats in a bipartisan lawsuit that sought to have the undeclared military adventure ruled unconstitutional. He started calling for the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq in 2004, although he has been supportive of the Afghanistan occupation. These days, Campbell says, "There are…occasions when the United States should decline the invitation to go to war. This is especially so where United States interests are not directly at risk, or where success will depend upon many years' involvement in nation-building."

That's hardly a radical line, but it is radically at odds with the neoconservative worldview. To be sure, even if Rand Paul and Tom Campbell eventually make it to the Senate, there will still be plenty of Republicans who want to play world policeman. But even progressives with concerns about domestic policies advanced by a Paul or a Campbell will appreciate the irony in Senator Russ Feingold finally having some GOP Senate allies when he questions why America has not formally declared a war since the 1940s, and when he says Congress should apply constitutional checks and balances on imperial presidents. And, of course, there's the richer irony that Republican primary voters might upset the best-laid plans of Dick Cheney. JOHN NICHOLS

Beyond Business as Usual

COMMENT

Now that we're in the endgame of financial reform, and a second stimulus is off the table, it's looking more and more as if the nation's jobless will be fending for themselves. The punditocracy has declared that the recovery is for real, so 26 million officially unemployed and underemployed Americans will be getting a promise of future growth. But a return to business as usual—"jobs and income will trickle down via growth"—is a disaster, on economic and ecological grounds.

First, it won't work. The Economic Policy Institute calculates that we'd have to add half a million jobs each month for three years to get back to the pre-crash unemployment rate. Given that the biggest monthly job growth number we've seen in this recovery has been 162,000, with a hefty chunk of that attributable to temporary Census jobs and stimulus spending, half a million is an order of magnitude larger than what we can realistically expect. Globalization means that many of the new jobs will be created offshore. Even more significant, growth-induced productivity increases and labor-saving technical change are reducing employers' need for workers. Robots are being used to clean up the gulf oil spill; customer service representatives are no longer people but machines. This is mostly a good thing, but only if the displaced find a livelihood. As Robert Pollin recently argued in these pages, the aggregate output, or overall growth, approach won't get us back to 5 percent unemployment until 2017.

The other flaw in the "grow our way out of unemployment" approach is that it's ecological suicide. The latest findings on climate change are that we have already passed critical, frightening thresholds. We must reduce atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide to 350 parts per million as quickly as possible even to have a chance at forestalling catastrophe. As Americans, our responsibility to reduce emissions is unique. Our 4 percent of the planet's population accounts for 28 percent of its total carbon legacy, and our annual per capita carbon footprint is twice the size of many Western European countries'. It's more than quadruple that of China. A bottom-up, technology-based shift to cleaner energy is essential, but its effects will phase in gradually. It's nearly impossible to meet emission targets only by reducing the carbon intensity of each dollar spent. But we can get results immediately by changing the path of aggregate output. As American GDP fell in 2008, so did greenhouse gas emissions.

Progressive economists have mostly responded to the economic crisis with retro-policy, advocating financial reform and spending on infrastructure, including on green jobs. These things are necessary. But New Deal 2.0—expanded federal spending—still relies on climate-destabilizing growth. The retrofits and conservation measures that result from green jobs programs in effect mimic reductions in the price of energy. They free up purchasing power for other goods and services, the production of which causes more emissions. Unless we find a solution that does not rely on expanding overall demand, we'll be addressing unemployment by unleashing even more climate chaos.

The alternative is to transform the labor market by introducing downward flexibility in hours of work. If jobs are restructured to require fewer hours, employers will have to hire more people for a given level of sales. If work time were allocated more equitably, it would not only reduce unemployment; there would be wider benefits to all workers, their families and communities.

The industrialized economies have followed the path of hours reductions since the late nineteenth century. A sizable portion of productivity growth was used to increase leisure time, and between 1870 and 1970 annual working hours in most Western countries fell from 3,000 hours to fewer than 2,000. This history reveals that workers who lost their jobs to technological change and industrial restructuring were reabsorbed into the labor market by a combination of economic growth and falling hours. In most European countries this process has continued, and Germany is notable for containing unemployment

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

On the Gulf Oil Spill

Because of this spill,
That "Drill, baby, drill,"
Which always seemed shrill,
Now seems shriller still—
And certainly will
When we get the bill.

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An Open Letter to... People Who Enjoy Reading Open Letters

In the last issue of *The Nation*, someone who identified herself as having sought "the presidential nomination of the Green Party in 2004" took out a full page ad to write an Open Letter accusing me, and 350.org, of insufficient zeal and clarity in the fight against climate change. In particular, she railed against the rumored Senate climate bill, and argued that:

> *"If we truly believe that we must cut back to 350 ppm within five years, there is no alternative to shunting the existing energy legislation aside and replacing it with an uncompromising muscular piece of legislation."*

In point of fact, I've already argued strongly against the bill in the pages of half a dozen national publications, most recently *The Washington Post*. And in further point of fact, nothing we do will return us to an atmospheric carbon concentration of 350 ppm within five years, or fifty. It will be a long slow process, since forests and oceans take many years to sequester atmospheric CO_2 in these quantities. The youngest people reading this Open Letter will be elderly before the atmosphere returns to anything like the levels scientists say are safe, even if we do everything right. That's sad, but it's simply physics.

But points of fact aside, the Open Letter raises a deeper question that we think is important: the idea that if we don't like something in Congress, it can be simply shunted aside and replaced with an "uncompromising muscular piece of legislation." For that to happen we would need not Open Letters, but organizing. The environmental movement is not strong enough to exert any real power in Washington, and insisting that it should do so anyway is not a strategy, it's a tantrum.

350.org is not a big operation. I'm a volunteer—our core staff of 7 are all 25 years old. But last year we managed to organize, on one day in October, 5,200 demonstrations and rallies in 181 countries, what Foreign Policy called the "largest ever coordinated global rally of any kind." It didn't carry the day at Copenhagen—we persuaded 117 nations to adopt the 350 target, but they were the wrong 117, the poor and most vulnerable nations, not the rich and addicted ones. So: we're organizing more and bigger, and we need your help. On October 10 we're hosting a 'global work party,' with actions in thousands of places around the world. Folks will be putting up solar panels, digging community gardens, laying out bike paths. Not because we think we'll solve climate change one bike path at a time—we won't. We'll begin to address it only when we put a stiff price on carbon. But we want to send a strong message to our leaders: If we can get to work, so can you. If we can climb on the roof of the school and hammer in a solar panel, you can climb to the floor of the Senate and do your job.

We'd be grateful for your help. At the very least, I hope you'll go to 350.org and look at the pictures (25,000 in our Flickr account) that have flowed in from across the planet. *Nation* readers will be gratified, I think, to see the upsurge in action and protest, and particularly to see that the old stereotype of environmentalists as affluent white people is simply wrong. This is a growing global movement, and it needs to grow still more. So please join in.

Bill McKibben for 350.org

10/10/10 GLOBAL WORK PARTY

350.org

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resulting from the global collapse by reducing hours. Here in the United States the mainstream economic discourse has essentially banned hours reduction from the conversation.

The United States has been an outlier, as in the 1970s per capita annual hours of work started to diverge from this historic pattern. Americans began to work more, not less, with the average worker putting in 204 more hours in 2006 than in 1973. A combination of high benefits costs (especially for health insurance), weak unions and a slack labor market leading to longer schedules. In the earlier period, when hours were falling, productivity growth was partly passed on as a shorter workweek. When that stopped, one result was that a rising level of GDP was required to produce each job. The average German worker now labors 350 fewer hours per year than his or her US counterpart, as does the average worker in the Netherlands and Norway. The gap with France and Italy is 200 hours. In other words, to employ an American worker, in comparison to a European, 15 percent to 25 percent more hours of work have to be created.

After the economic collapse, some companies did use worksharing and furloughs to minimize layoffs, but there seems to be little momentum to expand those programs or refashion them for use during a recovery. It's a cause progressives should take up, by advocating the conversion of involuntary share-the-pain measures into desirable workplace benefits. Four-day workweeks have been very popular. New employees can be hired on 80 percent schedules, a policy the Netherlands used to contain unemployment in the 1980s. Survey evidence and the basic maxims of behavioral economics find that people strongly prefer to gain free time at the expense of income they haven't yet received (i.e., future raises) over taking cuts in current paychecks.

Rather than letting hours rise as the economy grows, the green progressive solution will be to use productivity growth to create more time off from the job while keeping pay stable after inflation, at least for higher-paid workers. (Lower-paid workers should get increases *and* time off, to redress inequality.) There are a number of carrots that governments can use to get us onto this path, such as tax credits, partial-unemployment insurance and subsidies. This will allow our carbon footprint to shrink much faster, because of the additional spending that is not injected into the economy and because as people have more free time, they shift to lower-impact modes of transportation and consumption. One study from the Center for Economic and Policy Research found that if the United States were to shift to Western European work patterns, energy use would fall by 20 percent. Nations with lower hours of work have smaller ecological footprints, after controlling for income and other variables.

Conventionally, those calling for fewer hours of work point to the good that would come from having more time for family and community. And they are correct. But there's an even more transformational path that becomes economically rational as the balance between the availability of time and cash is altered: people reduce their dependence on the formal market by acquiring goods and services through "self-providing." The most common activities are food related, such as growing vegetables, raising poultry or keeping bees. But self-providing is also occurring in household energy generation, and ecologically friendly forms of do-it-yourself home construction, using materials such as straw bale, stone and compressed earth. There's even a small-scale-manufacturing movement, in which people use computer-driven, personal-fabrication technologies to make a range of products, from toasters to bicycle frames.

Across all these activities, the key is to take the time that is freed up from the corporate economy and use it to meet needs. The production methods are clean and green. And creating more self-reliance in food, energy and housing leaves people better equipped to weather the economic and climate storms that will be more likely in coming decades. As alternate ways to feed, house and power ourselves develop, communities become more resilient and self-determining. This is also a strategy for reducing inequality, as people learn new life-supporting skills that create livelihoods and enhance their labor market power.

Ultimately a progressive economic vision is one in which our economic arrangements yield a sustaining planet, creative work and fair distribution. The business-as-usual economy is failing miserably on all those fronts. It's time to diversify out of it, in the process creating low-impact, high-return communities that nourish us and the planet. JULIET SCHOR

Juliet Schor is professor of sociology at Boston College. This article was adapted from her book Plenitude: The New Economics of True Wealth.

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Ten Things.

Ten Things You Can Do for Healthcare Reform

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act signed by President Obama is, we hope, a first step on the way to a Medicare-for-all type program, which would offer better coverage at a lower cost by cutting out private insurers. Under the new healthcare system, however, private insurance companies are guaranteed millions of new customers, and regulations on the industry aren't as tough as they should be. Big Pharma and HMOs were also able to secure lavish subsidies and concessions in the bill. Drs. David U. Himmelstein and Steffie Woolhandler, longtime advocates for single payer with Physicians for a National Health Program (pnhp.org), have sifted through the mounds of information and misinformation to bring you ten things you need to know about the new law and a few actions to bring true reform to the healthcare industry.

1 The act risks ensconcing skimpy coverage as the norm. Participating plans are required to cover only 60 percent of expected healthcare costs, leaving families responsible for huge out-of-pocket expenses. The law will also tax "Cadillac plans," hitting millions of working families. Work with union activists to repeal the tax, maintain comprehensive healthcare benefits and fight for Medicare for all. For more info, see unionsforsinglepayerhr676.org.

2 The law reduces Medicare's out-of-pocket costs for drugs by closing the infamous "donut hole," covering 75 percent of these costs by 2020. But the deal is even better for drug firms, who'll be getting paid full price for their products. Push to replace the privatized Medicare drug-coverage program with a fully public plan that would use its bargaining power to force down drug prices by about 40 percent.

3 HMOs were allowed into Medicare on the promise that they would save money, but over time they successfully lobbied Congress to increase their Medicare payments to 14 percent above costs. The new healthcare law cuts about $136 billion from these overpayments. Advocate for eliminating them entirely and phasing out investor-owned health providers that deliver inferior care at inflated prices.

4 The law will reduce federal subsidies to public and other safety-net hospitals. Yet 23 million Americans will remain uninsured and tens of millions more will continue to rely on safety-net providers because hospitals often shun insured patients with unprofitable illnesses. Unless the assault on public hospitals is stopped, millions of sick Americans may find they have nowhere to go. For more information, go to naph.org and click on "Advocate."

5 Insurance and Big Pharma lobbyists' fingerprints are all over the new law. It's time to curb their influence. Join efforts for public funding of political campaigns (publicampaign.org). Ask your elected officials to stop taking funds from the health insurance lobby and push for tougher regulation of Big Pharma (citizen.org/hrg).

6 Expose and agitate against insurance firms' abuse of their customers and the outrageous incomes paid to their executives. Share your story at the excellent site maintained by the California Nurses Association (guaranteedhealthcare.org/node/add/user-story).

7 The law excludes undocumented immigrants from buying insurance in the new exchanges, even if they can pay full price, and bars green-card holders from receiving any publicly subsidized insurance for five years. Defend the right to healthcare for everyone. Sign the petition at cihj.org.

8 Keep up to date on reform at pnhp.org or cjr.org/campaign_desk/trudy_lieberman_campaign_desk.php. Show Michael Moore's *Sicko* in your community, and start a dialogue about what true reform should look like.

9 Work with state-based single-payer groups. Vermont passed a law that mandates the design of new healthcare models, including the possibility of single payer. Similar bills have been introduced in California, Maryland and Minnesota. Go to pnhp.org/news/state-single-payer-news.

10 Exercise, eat right and advocate for public policies that facilitate healthier lives (whatispublichealth.org). The fight for real national health insurance will carry on into the 2010 election cycle and beyond. We need you around for the long haul.

CONCEIVED BY WALTER MOSLEY with research by Rae Gomes

"Ten Things" is a monthly feature. Readers who wish to propose ideas for it should e-mail NationTenThings@gmail.com.

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Eric Alterman

Party Every Day

Not long ago, Fox News's Alisyn Camerota interviewed Fox contributor Karl Rove and committed one of those faux pas that can make viewing Fox so interesting. She asked Rove about the steady stream of Code Pink protesters who had been following him on his book tour. "These are sort of sad and pathetic people," Rove explained. "Let's not give them any more attention." Some viewers who remember the separation between the role of journalist and "politician," consultant and/or huckster might have been surprised to see a paid employee of a putative news organization admonishing a journalist on air for daring to ask a difficult question.

Of course, Karl Rove is no ordinary employee, just as Fox is no ordinary news organization. Fox also employs Newt Gingrich, Mike Huckabee, Sarah Palin, Dick Morris and many other Republican politicians and potential presidential candidates. Even its full-time journalists, like Fred Barnes, sometimes moonlight as Republican fundraisers. True, Fox did force Sean Hannity to cancel an appearance for a group of tea party organizers charging money to experience his aura. But a Media Matters investigation demonstrates beyond any doubt that such appearances are business as usual at the network, saying "at least twenty Fox News personalities have endorsed, raised money for or campaigned for Republican candidates or causes, or against Democratic candidates or causes, in more than 300 instances and in at least 49 states"—and they have been routinely advertised as Fox News personalities while doing so.

Fox may be the most brazen in its refusal to observe any useful distinction between journalist and everyone else, but the difference between the two labels is everywhere becoming increasingly difficult to discern. In the recent special issue of *Time* promoting the alleged 100 "Most Influential People in the World," the actual practice of journalism could hardly be less relevant. Can *Time* readers really expect a candid assessment of the relative strengths and weaknesses of Gen. Stanley McChrystal by his immediate superior, Gen. David Petraeus? Can Mitt Romney, running for his party's nomination for president and eager for support from the influential new star of his party, from his home state, honestly assess Scott Brown? And in what may be the most offensive single page in the history of the magazine (this issue was published, ironically, days after *The Publisher*, Alan Brinkley's masterly biography of Henry Luce), its editors, perhaps suffering from a rare, undiagnosed form of cat scratch fever, picked Ted Nugent—yes, the deadbeat dad who had to be sued to provide child support to his illegitimate child; who terms Hillary Clinton "a worthless bitch"; and who believes "Barack Hussein Obama should be put in jail"—to explain Sarah Palin.

How'd he do? Well for starters, Nugent claims, "The tsunami of support proves that Sarah, 46, represents what many Americans know to be common and sensible." Actually, Sarah Palin's approval rating stands at a whopping 24 percent, about half of Obama's. Perhaps *Time*'s fact-checkers were worried that Nugent might shoot them if they asked any impertinent questions. (Please don't shoot me either, Ted. I kid because I love.)

Time's "Most Influential" is less a newsmagazine than an advertiser-friendly, mutual-masturbation exercise of a kind one often finds at particularly fancy fundraisers where "friends" and acolytes buy pages to sing the honoree's praises. And it comes on the heels of *The New York Times Magazine*'s 8,000-word devotional profile of *Politico*'s Mike Allen, whose early morning "Playbook" e-mail performs a similar task on a daily basis. To be fair, Allen's "Playbook" compares favorably with the *Tiger Beat* treatment by *Time* of Palin et al. But its distinguishing feature is its insistence on treating everyone in the Beltway "game" as playing on the same team. Republicans, Democrats, reporters, consultants, corporate lobbyists; the jobs are interchangeable for the right kind of insider. Allen's Boswell, Mark Liebovich, described the human embodiment of the daily e-mail at a party in which "a couple hundred influentials gathered for a Mardi Gras-themed birthday party for Betsy Fischer, the executive producer of 'Meet the Press.' Held at the Washington home of the lobbyist Jack Quinn, the party was a classic Suck-Up City affair in which everyone seemed to be congratulating one another on some recent story, book deal, show or haircut." The next paragraph featured former DNC chair Terry McAuliffe; former RNC chair Ed Gillespie; Fox News's Greta Van Susteren; White House major-domo David Axelrod; *Meet the Press*'s David Gregory; *Newsweek* editor Jon Meacham; and NBC's Andrea Mitchell and her husband, deposed godhead Alan Greenspan. In what might be the most distasteful image ever described in a major metropolitan newspaper, Liebovich informs us, "In the basement, a very white, bipartisan Soul Train was getting down to hip-hop." (All that's missing is Michael Steele and a dominatrix or two.)

The following weekend, Washington found itself riveted by its annual mash-up of politics, celebrity and journalism called the White House Correspondents' Association Dinner. Fox News honcho Roger Ailes spoke the truest words of his life when he explained of reporters at the dinner, "They are not here as journalists."

I missed all the fun. As the cocktails were being served, I was in a Greenwich Village church basement with a group of diehard *Dissent*-ers, listening to scholars Michael Walzer, Robin Blackburn, Sheri Berman and Michael Kazin discuss liberalism, socialism, social democracy and their relationship (or lack thereof) to the present state of politics. No moguls, no celebrities and no (evident) lesbian bondage; just a group of unfashionable folk trying to figure out how to be good citizens in an age in which America's political class has all but abandoned the idea as, sadly, passé. ■

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ARI BERMAN

BILL HALTER'S SENATE CHALLENGE IS REVVING UP RAZORBACK PROGRESSIVES

Little Rock

In early March embattled Arkansas Senator Blanche Lincoln unveiled her first re-election campaign commercial. Sitting in a room with a bunch of screaming adolescents—which she considered an apt metaphor for modern-day Washington—Lincoln, a Democrat, touted her votes "against giving more money to Wall Street, against the auto company bailout, against the public-option healthcare plan and against the cap-and-trade bill that would have raised energy costs on Arkansans." Never mind that she once supported a number of the policies she now claimed to oppose, including the TARP bailout and a government insurance option as part of healthcare reform. Times had changed and so had her message. "Some in my party didn't like it very much," she acknowledged. "But I don't answer to my party. I answer to Arkansas." Indeed, the ad's outright defiance of President Obama and the Democratic leadership encapsulated why so many party activists were furious with her and other conservative Democrats in Congress, whom they blamed for thwarting or emasculating Obama's chief legislative priorities. "Almost any Republican could run that ad this year," observed conservative commentator Torie Clarke.

A month earlier, one poll had found that only 27 percent of Arkansans approved of the job Lincoln was doing, prompting buzz that she might not run for re-election. Left, right and center viewed her as weak, vacillating and unprincipled. For months frustrated progressives in Arkansas and Washington had been searching for a candidate to replace her, convinced she couldn't win a general election and, even if she could, there wasn't much point in having her around. In early March, Arkansas Lieutenant Governor Bill Halter, a Clinton administration alum and rising star in state politics, announced he would challenge Lincoln in the May 18 Democratic primary. "I'm a proud Democrat," Halter said. "I don't shirk from that label."

He immediately struck a populist chord, criticizing Lincoln for approving a $700 billion bailout with scant accountability for Wall Street; flip-flopping on the public option and the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), both of which she once supported but later threatened to filibuster after conservatives attacked her; backing trade deals, like NAFTA and CAFTA, that shipped Arkansas jobs overseas; and sponsoring legislation to repeal the estate tax. Support for Halter from local and national unions, environmental groups and netroots activists, who came of age during the campaigns of Howard Dean and Barack Obama, soon followed. Four unions pledged to spend more than $1 million each on Halter's behalf. After announcing his candidacy, the Halter campaign raised more than $1 million online in thirty-six hours. Rarely had a primary candidate entered a race with such momentum—the tea partyers were not the only ones who were mad as hell. "I view this as a race about who's going to be on the side of middle-class Arkansans," Halter told *The Nation*. "But I'm also mindful of the fact that core Democratic constituencies have rallied to my campaign because they do see it as important in terms of determining the future direction of the party."

Halter versus Lincoln is now a key front in the battle for the soul of the Democratic Party, and a test of whether progressive groups and candidates can organize effectively on conservative terrain, especially in an election cycle as fraught as this one is for Democrats. Halter might be the most high-profile Democratic primary challenger this cycle, but there's likely to be a few more like him before the year is done.

While most of the country turned bluer in 2008, Arkansas grew significantly more red. Obama got shellacked by Hillary Clinton in the state's primary and lost the general election there to John McCain by twenty points. Yet Arkansas is the last Southern state where Democrats are a dominant electoral majority. After the '08 election, the party controlled the governor's mansion, both Senate seats, three of four Congressional districts and ninety-nine of 135 seats in the State Legislature. The "redneck/blackneck coalition" of rural white and black voters, which has proved so elusive in most of the South, is vibrant in much of the state, at least on the local level. "FDR was worshiped in Arkansas," says longtime state political columnist Ernie Dumas. "That's only now just wearing off." Affection for the New Deal icon may have lasted so long because the state has always been inescapably hardscrabble, ranking near the bottom in quality-of-life indicators like per capita income and educational achievement. "Thank God for Mississippi," Arkansans joke. "We don't go

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with the rest of the country," says political columnist Gene Lyons. "The Industrial Revolution missed us."

The Arkansas Delta region, which borders Mississippi, has long been one of the poorest parts of the state. The town of Monticello, population 10,000, is in the depths of the delta, dotted with pine trees and hillier than the surrounding counties, mostly flat soybean, cotton and rice fields. Like much of the region, roughly a fifth of Monticello lives below the poverty line. On a Tuesday evening in late April, twenty-five people gather at a Western Sizzlin to meet Bill Halter. The candidate arrives in a white pickup, wearing a black suit and red-and-yellow striped tie. He's short and trim, with a full head of John Edwards–esque brown hair. Halter is more wonky than charming, comfortable discussing the nuts and bolts of Social Security but not much of a storyteller. Think Bill Clinton without the charisma. Halter's strength is his intellect; everybody agrees the guy is whip smart. The biggest knock, which you hear repeatedly from Arkansas insiders, is his perceived arrogance and aloofness, hardly a rarity in politics but a shortcoming in a state that likes its politicians down-home and folksy. "I'm pretty determined," Halter says in Monticello when asked to name a fault, "and probably less patient than Mother Teresa."

Halter's campaign is a key test of whether progressive groups and candidates can organize effectively on conservative terrain.

He stands in front of a podium without notes or a microphone, rubbing his hands as he recounts his life story. Halter grew up in a middle-class household in North Little Rock, the eldest son of a nurse and small-business owner, bagged groceries as a teenager and won a scholarship to Stanford. Like that other famous Arkansan, he went to Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, studying economics; then he worked at the prestigious consulting firm McKinsey & Company, advising a number of start-ups and making a bundle of money. He took a job at the Office of Management and Budget in the Clinton administration and then served in 1999 as deputy director of the Social Security Administration (he later spoke out against George W. Bush's plan to privatize Social Security). Halter returned to Arkansas in 2005 and, after flirting with a run for governor, jumped into the race for lieutenant governor, defeating a longtime state legislator in the primary, which earned him the lasting enmity of the state's Democratic establishment. As his signature issue, Halter advocated for creating a lottery to fund college scholarships, which passed easily and is quite popular. It's not hard to see why: 28,000 Arkansans with a GPA of 2.5 or above will receive a $5,000 scholarship to attend an in-state public university this year.

On the stump Halter is campaigning more as a champion of the little guy than as an outspoken liberal. "I'm running to put Washington back on the side of middle-class Arkansas families," he says over and over. His goal and challenge is to capture the anti-Washington sentiments of the electorate, thus far exploited by the tea partyers, and steer that anger in a more progressive direction while painting his opponent as an ally of big banks and corporate downsizers. In Monticello, Halter criticizes the TARP bailout, Wall Street recklessness and the mounting federal deficit while plugging his record on education and pledging to eliminate tax breaks for companies that ship jobs overseas. (The Chamber of Commerce, long a proponent of outsourcing, is running a bizarre and incendiary ad on Lincoln's behalf, featuring Indian actors "thanking" Halter for serving on the board of a company that opened an office in Bangalore, India.)

Halter never mentions Obama or the Democratic Party in his speech. Monticello's Drew County voted overwhelmingly for McCain, and during the Q&A audience members express their fear that Social Security will go bankrupt and rail against undocumented immigrants, the lack of jobs and the recently passed healthcare bill. "Where do you stand on that healthcare stuff?" asks an elderly woman. Halter says he supported the bill, though he would have liked a voluntary public option and wasn't crazy about the excise tax. He faults Lincoln for opposing its final passage via reconciliation. (Lincoln's position on healthcare defies simple characterization—she initially backed a public insurance option but later threatened to filibuster any bill that included one, ultimately supporting Senate healthcare legislation in December but opposing the reconciliation vote in March.)

Widespread skepticism of Obama's legislative agenda poses a major impediment to Democratic candidates in November. I meet two undecided independent voters after the event who voted for Obama in the primary, because of their dislike of Hillary, but for McCain in the general election. Neither likes the healthcare bill. Jeff Loveless, who works at AT&T, says he plans to "take revenge against Blanche" for her December vote for the bill. Ricky Naron, who also works in communications, said he doesn't believe in "government solutions to personal problems." Nonetheless, both say they're considering voting for Halter, in the primary at least, despite their disagreements with him on healthcare and other issues. "He's not her," Loveless explains. (Republicans and independents can vote in the Democratic primary, making it harder to gauge where the party stands ideologically.)

Can Halter court liberal and conservative voters with the same populist pitch? Or is he simply playing both sides and deluding the progressive groups that have rallied around his candidacy? Lincoln, in response to Halter's challenge, has tacked left since the primary began—running ads on African-American radio stations alleging she "stood with our president to pass healthcare reform" and accusing Halter of supporting cuts to Social Security benefits. (*Arkansas News* columnist John Brummett—who has been nominally pro-Lincoln—calls her mailers "practically pornographic in their vile absurdity.") Lincoln now says Halter's not any more liberal than she is. "He just wants the job," she told *Politico*. Democratic

Ari Berman is a Nation *contributing writer. His book* Herding Donkeys: The Fight to Rebuild the Democratic Party and Reshape American Politics, *will be published in October by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.*

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strategist Mike Lux remembers Halter as "more on the conservative side" when he served in the Clinton administration, labeling him a "classic Southern Democrat." Indeed, Halter is probably a moderate at heart—a pro-business deficit hawk who says he wouldn't support cap-and-trade legislation without "significant revisions." He has declined to say whether he would have voted for EFCA, though he does support a compromise bill that would remove the controversial card-check provision while still making it easier for workers to join a union.

Halter insists, in our interview, that he won't become a Lincoln clone once he gets to Washington. "There's more of a willingness on my part to go up against special-interest-group pressure," he says. "I don't think by style I've done the same thing [as she] as lieutenant governor. I've looked for opportunities to push the limits of that office." The groups that have endorsed him agree. "He's not going to be the most progressive member of the Senate," says Ben Tribbett, executive director of Accountability Now, a coalition of progressive groups supporting Halter, "but I think most people understand he's going to be an extraordinarily progressive senator for Arkansas." Adds Alan Hughes, president of the Arkansas AFL-CIO, "Bill has an open ear. Bill is willing to sit down and listen to everybody's ideas, which we've not seen from Senator Lincoln."

Halter's goal and challenge is to steer the anti-Washington anger of the electorate in a more progressive direction.

"If you are ready to kick some ass for the working class, say yeeaaaahhhhh!" Willie Holmes, a 29-year-old labor activist from Youngstown, Ohio, is firing up the troops on a Wednesday afternoon at a union hall in downtown Little Rock. For the past month about twenty-five canvassers employed by Working America, an affiliate of the AFL-CIO, have fanned out across the Little Rock area to knock on doors, spreading the word of Halter's candidacy. Holmes came to town in April 2009 to organize in support of EFCA. Working America, which courts workers who don't have a union and tend to be socially conservative but receptive to a populist message, had zero members in the state at the time. "I didn't know what to expect," says Holmes. He thought he'd stay for two months, but a year later he's still here—and Working America now has 19,000 members in the state. The infectiously exuberant Holmes has coined a theme song for the current mission. "Work-ing Am-er-i-ca, we are all he-roes," he chants. "Gonna bring Blanche Lincoln down to ze-ro."

That evening Holmes canvasses a modest, mixed-race neighborhood of small ranch houses in southwest Little Rock. At one door he asks Lee McClenney, a 64-year-old retiree, what his most important issue is. "Bailouts," McClenney answers in a slow drawl. Holmes asks if he knows who he'll support in the primary. "I'm not supporting Blanche," McClenney says. "She did a good job, but her turn is over." Holmes mentions the campaign contributions Lincoln has pocketed from Wall Street, more than $700,000 over her career. "The longer they're in Washington, the more they step back and put their hand out for the next check," McClenney replies. He says that he and his wife and daughter, who work the polls for extra money, are all voting for Halter.

In the span of two hours, Holmes knocks on fifty doors and talks to a dozen voters: eight for Halter, three for Lincoln, one undecided. Halter needs a big turnout in the Little Rock area, which accounts for half the state's electorate, to win the primary. It's going to take a lot more work, Holmes knows, to get him over the finish line. Unions backing Halter have roughly 40,000 members in Arkansas, a marginal number in a general election but enough to be a factor in a primary. "If we turn out enough people, it'll make a difference in the race," says Alan Hughes.

Halter's campaign does seem to be getting under Lincoln's skin and forcing her hand in Washington. As chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, Lincoln has jurisdiction over the regulation of derivatives, a major aspect of Obama's financial reform legislation. She was initially expected to unveil a weak compromise, but under pressure from Halter and the Obama administration (the White House supports her candidacy), she unexpectedly produced a far tougher bill, which her committee approved on April 21, a sure sign the primary is having an effect. "If you look at what she was saying previously, it's a profound change," says Halter campaign manager Carol Butler.

Lincoln has recently been trumpeting the legislation, hoping to undercut Halter's populist support. "I produced the toughest reform bill of anyone in Washington," she said at an April 24 debate in Little Rock. "Only in Washington do you pat yourself on the back for trying to clean up a mess that you helped create," Halter said. He called on her to return the campaign contributions she's received from Goldman Sachs. "So I suppose it is inappropriate for me to take campaign contributions from the National Association of Cotton Growers or the American Soybean Association or…any of the other entities that I provide laws and regulations for in terms of trying to make a better government," Lincoln declared. "Senator, I see a clear distinction between soybean growers and Wall Street," Halter replied. "Soybean growers didn't wreck our economy." Lincoln eventually donated to charity the $7,500 she received from Goldman Sachs for her re-election bid.

The latest polls show Lincoln leading Halter by eight points but doing slightly worse in general-election matchups with Republican contenders. Whoever emerges will face a tough race in the fall, with the GOP favored to take the seat (its front-runner is John Boozman, who has represented northwest Arkansas in Congress for nine years). Most observers expect the race to tighten. A third candidate, right-wing businessman D.C. Morrison, who supported Ron Paul in '08 but claims to be a Democrat, could force a runoff between Halter and Lincoln on June 8. That may favor Halter. "The undecideds don't like her," says Butler. "But they need to get to know him better."

Lincoln, though, has history on her side. In the past twenty years only four incumbent senators have lost a primary. When Ned Lamont ran against Joe Lieberman in Connecticut in 2006,

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nobody thought he could win; nearly every major politician and Democratic-aligned interest group endorsed Lieberman. Even after Lamont shocked Lieberman in the primary, groups like Planned Parenthood, NARAL and the Human Rights Campaign stuck with Lieberman's independent run, thwarting the progressive insurgent.

Two years later, when progressive activist Donna Edwards ran for a second time against conservative Democrat Al Wynn in suburban Maryland, the situation was practically reversed. After Edwards narrowly lost in '06, progressive groups, including the League of Conservation Voters, EMILY's List, the SEIU and MoveOn, helped her over the finish line in '08. Following her victory, a number of groups in the Edwards coalition formed Accountability Now to replicate her success. Halter was their first recruit in 2010. "Something I find encouraging about Arkansas and potentially in other races is the fact that some of the bigger institutional players seem more willing to be engaged in primaries," says former Lamont campaign manager Tom Swan. "There's now a belief that it's possible to beat incumbents in a primary, and there's a point, win or lose, in sending a message." Before the final healthcare vote, organized labor threatened to defeat any Democrat who voted no; the SEIU, for example, is now targeting half a dozen Democratic House members and planning on running third-party candidates, even if Democrats lose seats as a result.

Not everyone agrees with this strategy, including Donna Edwards. "I don't have an interest in being a progressive member of Congress in the minority," she says. Edwards points out that she ran in a solidly blue district that would have gone Democratic no matter who won the primary. In many districts, particularly those represented by Blue Dogs, "it's not doable or even appropriate to run a primary challenge," Edwards says. "Smart progressives are going to be looking across the country and weigh very carefully where the opportunities are," she adds. Edwards admits that now that she's in Congress, it would be "very hard" for her to support a primary challenger like herself.

In fact, most moderate Democrats in Congress are not facing primary challenges this year. There is no "purge" inside the party comparable to the purity tests within the GOP. But those Democrats who have most egregiously thwarted Obama's agenda or repeatedly changed positions on big issues based on political convenience, like Lincoln, will remain vulnerable. Taking one out won't endanger all the others, but it will put them on notice that outspoken apostasy will be accommodated for only so long.

Progressive Democratic strategists argue that the party might have to sacrifice short-term electoral gains for long-term legislative success. "If progressives are going to make this a serious strategy, like the Club for Growth has, we've got to figure out how to get to a certain volume," says Mike Lux. "We can't do this one primary per cycle…. The Halter coalition has proved that a lot of money could be moved fast. The weakness of the progressive movement is that we don't have troops in places like Arkansas or in some of these districts represented by Blue Dogs. Until we figure out how to do more organizing in places like that, we're going to have trouble."

That's why Halter's candidacy—which has inspired exactly that kind of red-state organizing—presents such an intriguing model. "If Lincoln loses," says Tom Swan, "the fear of anyone up for re-election in two years is pretty real." Such an upset would have quite a ripple effect this year as well. ■

The Push to Isolate Iran

by ROBERT DREYFUSS

Sometime this month, various branches of the government will orchestrate a series of measures to further isolate Iran economically. President Obama is pushing for a fourth round of international sanctions against Iran at the UN Security Council, resulting in what is widely expected to be a series of targeted measures aimed at Iran's nuclear program and its sponsors in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and it's likely that the Security Council will act by June. In Congress a bill aimed at cutting off Iran's imports of gasoline and refined petroleum products is expected to land on the president's desk by the end of May. And at the Treasury Department officials are reportedly planning another round of unilateral American sanctions targeting Iran's financial sector, including both its private banks and even Bank Markazi, the Iranian central bank.

TIM ROBINSON

Behind all these actions—which will, in fact, inflict real suffering on ordinary Iranians—is a dirty little secret, however: virtually no one, including the proponents of sanctions, thinks they can work as intended, namely, to compel Iran to change its policy, suspend its uranium enrichment program and accept stricter oversight by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Inside the Obama administration, it's widely recognized that no combination of economic sanctions is likely to succeed. In Congress, even the most hawkish backers of the gasoline sanc-

Robert Dreyfuss is a Nation *contributing editor.*

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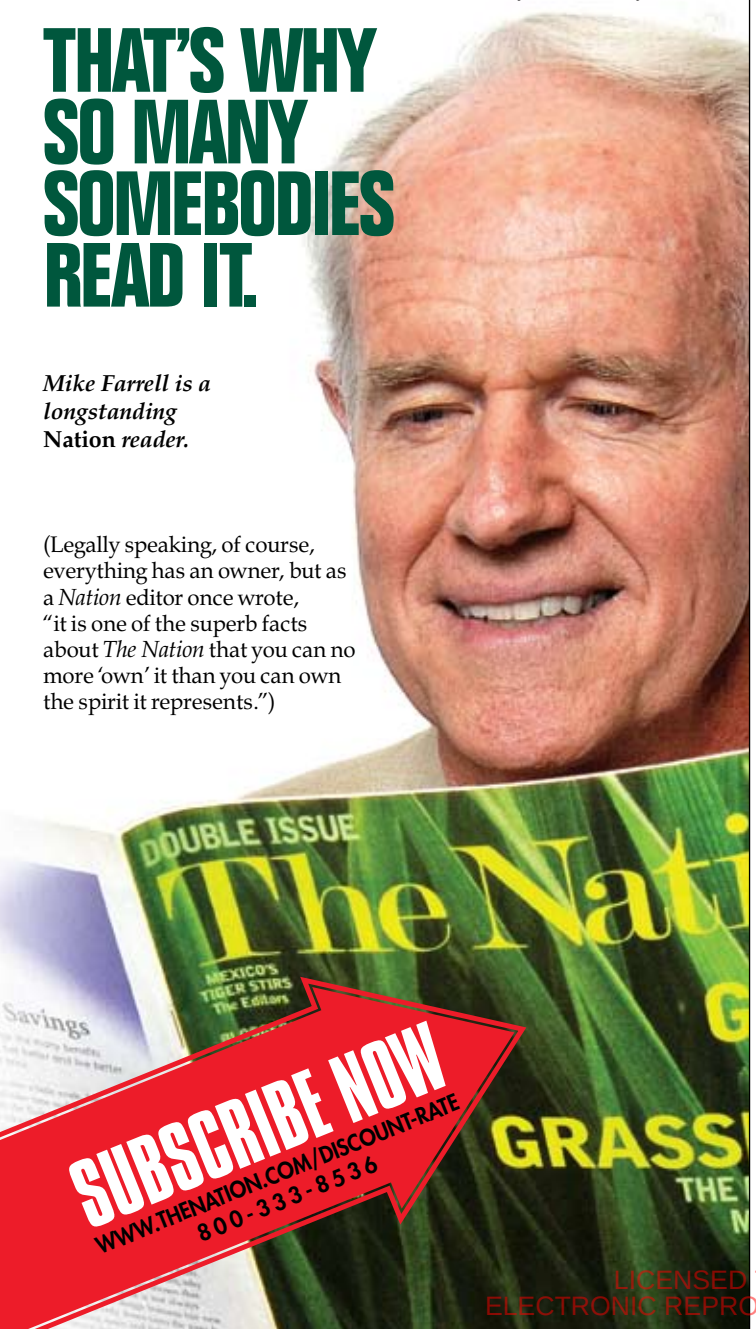

tions bill expect that it will fail. "Even crushing sanctions might not do the job," says Representative Ed Royce, a California Republican who is a chief sponsor of the measure. Around Washington, in think tanks and in interviews with Iran experts, it's taken for granted that sanctions as a tool aren't effective. "Most Iran analysts are skeptical that economic pressure will produce the desired results," says Suzanne Maloney of the Brookings Institution. Even a senior Israeli diplomat, who strongly supports sanctions and spoke on condition of anonymity, told *The Nation* that the world simply isn't ready to impose the sort of extreme economic measures that just might force Iran's hand. "The determination of Iran to continue its process seems to me to be more than the determination of the international community to stop it," he said.

Even if they don't achieve the desired goal, that doesn't mean sanctions won't have any effect. Sanctions are guaranteed to strengthen the hand of hawks and hardliners, including President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who will be able to blame various Great Satans for Iran's woes. A tighter economic noose will enrich the sanctions-busting smugglers in the IRGC. The additional sanctions will put the United States and Iran back on a path of confrontation, reversing or undoing much of the progress that was achieved by Obama's outreach to Tehran in 2009. And, worst of all, as it becomes clear over time that the new sanctions have failed to compel Iran to halt its nuclear program, that failure will underline the arguments of hawks in the United States and Israel who say that it's time for military action against Iran.

The administration's decision to adopt sanctions—the so-called "pressure track"—is a signal that President Obama has run out of ideas about how to handle Iran.

His effort began with great promise. In 2009 Obama reached out to Iran in his inaugural address; in a taped greeting on Iran's New Year; in two letters to Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader; and in his June 4 Cairo speech about rebuilding relations with the Muslim world. In so doing, Obama inspired many supporters of the reformist opposition in Iran in advance of the disputed presidential election on June 12. Obama's opening also led to a series of diplomatic exchanges that culminated in a deal, last October, in which Iran promised to send the bulk of its enriched uranium to Russia and France, where it was to have been reprocessed for civilian-use fuel rods. But that deal fell apart. Inside Iran it fell victim to the poisonous post–June 12 political atmosphere. And in the United States Republican hardliners, neoconservatives and allies of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) made it difficult for Obama to sweeten the deal in order to coax Iran back to the bargaining table.

The administration deserves plaudits for its constructive approach to Iran last year. But, under pressure from Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu and from hawks and AIPAC at home, Obama foolishly declared last spring that if the talks with Iran didn't succeed by the end of 2009, he'd rally world powers to pressure Iran, and Secretary of State Clinton began talking about "crippling sanctions." But nearly all experts on Iran, from left to right, knew that it was exceedingly unlikely that talks

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could succeed quickly. To no one's surprise, they stalemated. And Obama began pushing Russia, China and other reluctant countries, such as Brazil, India and Turkey, to climb aboard the sanctions bandwagon, with varying degrees of success. Yet even as Moscow and Beijing wearily moved to support another round of anti-Iran steps at the Security Council, they made it clear that the harsher penalties sought by Washington wouldn't fly.

And then what? According to insiders, the administration is playing it by ear, hoping for the best—and there's no evidence that it has a strategy going forward.

Can diplomacy get back on track? Some suggest that even though talks on the nuclear issue probably aren't going anywhere, it might be more productive to start talking to Iran about Afghanistan, Iraq and drug trafficking. Last fall John Limbert, a former US diplomat who was one of those held hostage in 1979–81 after the US Embassy in Tehran was seized, and who was recently appointed as the State Department's top Iran officer, said, "If we have negotiations where the only thing we care about is the nuclear issue, we will fail." Trita Parsi, president of the National Iranian American Council, urges Obama to avoid setting arbitrary deadlines on talks and to consider reopening last October's accord for modifications.

The additional sanctions will put the United States and Iran back on a path of confrontation, reversing much of Obama's 2009 outreach.

But just as Iran's negotiators are operating under severe domestic political constraints, so too is Obama. Most worrisome is the anti-Iran legislation working its way through Congress—the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability and Divestment Act, backed by Representative Howard Berman, the California Democrat who chairs the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, and Senator Chris Dodd, chair of the Senate Banking Committee. The bill, AIPAC's top priority since it was introduced, requires the administration to examine any and all contracts between Iran and foreign suppliers of gasoline and refined petroleum products. Any that exceed a tiny threshold—just $200,000—trigger a US crackdown, and the president is required to place the offending company on a blacklist. He must then take strong action against the company, up to and including seizing its US assets. The bill, in slightly different versions, passed the Senate and House with overwhelming, veto-proof majorities.

The bill ties the president's hands by making many of its measures mandatory, so the administration is seeking to modify it by expanding White House leeway to waive or postpone penalties. The administration has not condemned the bill outright, however, and it appears to be sending mixed messages to Congress. One top White House official, Dennis Ross—a close ally of the Israel lobby and a fierce supporter of sanctions and military bluster vis-à-vis Iran who most recently worked at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, an AIPAC spinoff—has reportedly told some in Congress to move the bill forward [see Dreyfuss, "Dennis Ross's Iran Plan," April 27, 2009].

Even that bill, in its harshest version, will only lead Iran to evade sanctions by smuggling and by dealing with sanctions-evading firms in China, the United Arab Emirates and elsewhere. The IRGC, which already operates a vast smuggling network, will gain. Meanwhile, the Security Council sanctions, certain to be watered down by Russian and Chinese foot-dragging, will have only symbolic impact. Most punishing for Iran will be the unilateral measures by the United States and its allies, coordinated by the Treasury Department's under secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, Stuart Levey—measures referred to inside the State Department as "Stuart Levey's jihad"—which target foreign investment and financial transactions between Iran and Western companies, including banks.

For the hawks, the hope is that sanctions are merely a way station for an eventual military showdown between Iran and the United States, though the chances that either the United States or Israel will bomb Iran are close to zero. For other supporters of sanctions, the idea is that causing further economic pain for Iran's population will inspire Iranians to revolt, perhaps re-igniting the stalled Green Movement, which formed before last summer's election. But that's unlikely—the government, increasingly relying on the IRGC, the paramilitary basijis and the intelligence service, has shown that it is ready to suppress dissent ruthlessly. As for the Obama administration, which hasn't entirely given up on diplomacy but apparently has no idea how to revive it, its support for the sanctions push seems to be a fingers-crossed effort to placate the hawks, the Republicans and AIPAC while buying time in the hope that something, anything, will allow diplomacy to resume.

But sanctions, pressure and confrontation are risky. To regain the high ground, President Obama must once again emphasize his readiness to talk with Iran on any and all issues. To calm the waters at home, he should take pains to emphasize that the problem with Iran is not an immediate crisis—that Iran does not have a bomb; that it is at least several years from acquiring one, even if that's what it intends to do; and that even if it does plan to acquire a bomb, Iran has developed neither a warhead nor a missile that can deliver such a weapon. Obama should explore creative ways to revive the deal that was signed last October, perhaps via intermediaries like Turkey; indeed, during the early May UN conference on nuclear nonproliferation, Ahmadinejad reiterated Iran's acceptance of the deal, and both Turkey and Brazil are offering to mediate a renewal of the October accord. In addition, Obama should signal that ultimately he is prepared to accept Iran's right to enrich uranium, under appropriate IAEA safeguards. (So far, Obama has said that Iran has the right to peaceful use of nuclear energy, but he has never acknowledged its right to enrichment as a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.) And he'll have to rally US allies, along with Russia and China, for a long and frustrating diplomatic adventure, with more false starts and roadblocks to come. ■

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Central Europe's Right-Wing Populism

The EU's neoliberal economic reforms have undermined public faith in democratic politics.

by PAUL HOCKENOS

Budapest

In the hurly-burly of Central Europe's postcommunist politics, a dramatic lurch to the right is nothing out of the ordinary. But the April elections in Hungary distinguish this onetime wunderkind of Mittel-Europa's transitions in more ways than one. The national populists of the Fidesz party captured more than two-thirds of Parliament, giving it an unprecedented supermajority that will enable the party to pass legislation at will and even alter the Constitution. Moreover, Hungary's third-largest party is the radical, ultranationalist Jobbik (Movement for a Better Hungary), which came from virtually nowhere to capture 15 percent of the vote in last year's European Parliament elections and a stunning 17 percent in April with anti-Roma slogans and calls for a Greater Hungary. A quarter of the votes for the neofascist party came from Hungarians between 18 and 29.

The greatest cause for alarm is that a similar context for the Hungarian rightists' triumphs exists in almost every one of the young democracies from the Baltics to the Balkans. While Central Europe has provided fertile soil for populist and far-right options since the democratic transitions began in 1989, the global economic crisis and the perceived failure of the European Union "to deliver" have supplied a stiff wind to their sails. Although parties like Fidesz and Jobbik resort to an array of demagoguery, their most potent asset by far is the deep disillusionment with the free-market policies of the past twenty years—"wild capitalism," as Fidesz calls it; in Jobbik's words, the interests of "Jewish capital."

This hodgepodge of Central European populists doesn't threaten democracy as such, as did Europe's interwar nationalists (today's populists win elections), but it has already diluted the quality of democracy in Europe and lowered the bar for what is acceptable in the EU. Their social populism in times of economic crisis pulls the rug out from under authentic left-wing challengers, something virtually nonexistent since communism's demise. The EU, for its part, has no answer to the politics of populism, even when they ratchet up tensions between EU member states, as the victory of the Hungarian right surely will with neighbors Slovakia and Romania. On the contrary, the Union's stark democratic deficiencies and one-size-fits-all economic prescriptions, part of the problem in the first place, only fan populism's flames.

While the EU's newcomers—the Baltic and Visegrad states (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland) as well as Romania, Bulgaria and Slovenia—have helped the continent overcome the East-West dichotomy of cold war Europe, they have imported into its mainstream something best understood as "illiberal democracy," systems that have all the trappings of constitutional states but lack the liberal political culture to make them function as healthy democracies. In different incarnations from country to country, they are characterized by charismatic demagogues, aggressive and personalized infighting, rampant corruption, the bullying of independent media, jingoistic nationalism and, at worst, even racist violence. Alienation between politicians and the electorate has caused public trust in democratic processes to plummet. This manifests itself in lower and lower voter turnouts as well as thin participation in extraparliamentary politics. All too often the recourse of frustrated voters has been to politicians who, in the name of opposing the powers that be, subvert liberal democracy and all it entails, including minority rights, pluralism and limitations on national sovereignty.

LASZLO BALOGH/REUTERS

A supporter of Hungary's far-right Jobbik party at a Budapest rally in October

Europe's new populists tout quirky agendas that cut across ideological fronts. Their simplistic programs and impassioned rhetoric can include typically right-wing elements, such as ethnic scapegoating, but also leftist critiques of income and power disparities. They divide society into two homogeneous and utterly antagonistic groups: "the people as such" (represented by their party) and a "corrupt, illegitimate elite" (some combination of pro–free market, EU-friendly, cosmopolitan policy-makers).

Until the Hungarian vote, no leadership better embodied this new populism than the current ruling coalition in Slovakia, headed by Prime Minister Robert Fico and his Smer party, which proudly calls itself "social democratic." Their coalition bedfellows are the far-right Slovak National Party (SNS), which has its roots in Slovakia's interwar clerical fascism, and the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia, still led by former Prime

Paul Hockenos, a writer based in Berlin, is the author of Free to Hate: The Rise of the Right in Post-Communist Eastern Europe.

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Professor Mark W. Muesse is Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee. He received a B.A., *summa cum laude*, in English Literature from Baylor University and earned a Masters of Theological Studies, a Masters of Arts, and a Ph.D. in the Study of Religion from Harvard University.

Prior to taking his position at Rhodes, Professor Muesse held positions at Harvard College, Harvard Divinity School, and the University of Southern Maine, where he served as Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Professor Muesse has written many articles, papers, and reviews in world religions, spirituality, theology, and gender studies and has coedited a collection of essays entitled *Redeeming Men: Religion and Masculinities*. He is currently compiling an anthology of prayers from around the world.

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Minister Vladimír Meciar, whose authoritarian rule in the 1990s isolated the country internationally and jeopardized Bratislava's EU ambitions. (I vividly remember a rally in Bratislava where a band of agitated Meciar supporters snatched my notebook, ripped it up and drove me off the premises shouting, "Journalist!" and "Fascist!") The Fico team came to power by hammering the middle-of-the-road incumbents for their free-market policies and their kowtowing to the EU and the United States. With no alternative program, once in power Fico changed next to nothing, even overseeing the early introduction of the euro, and it now defends the very same policies it once lambasted.

Among peers in the region, the Slovak populists play the nationalist card with particular consequence, a trump that EU membership was supposed to make redundant, as its precursor did between France and Germany in the postwar decades. Bratislava's anti-Magyar chauvinism has badly frayed relations with the country's ethnic Hungarians (10 percent of the population) as well as southern neighbor Hungary. Among the government's "worst of" sound bites are several handfuls from the SNS's vocal leader, Jan Slota, who, for example, called Hungarians "the cancer of the Slovak nation, which we need to remove from the body of the nation without delay." (While Western Europe isn't without its own far right, remarks this vulgar from ruling coalitions are out of bounds.) Although Slota's radicalism hasn't translated into radical policies, the government, "to show whom Slovakia belongs to," passed a law that limits the "official venues" where Hungarian may be spoken. The legislation provoked street protests from Slovakia's ethnic Hungarians (who were, predictably, then blasted for disloyalty) and unusually harsh recriminations from Budapest. In the recent Hungarian election campaign, the Slovaks' provocations played right into the hands of both Fidesz and Jobbik, who one-upped them at every opportunity to score points with nationalist voters.

Poland's own brand of populism is personified in, though not limited to, the Kaczynski twins, Jaroslaw and the late Lech. Their Law and Justice Party took power in 2005 on a Poland-first, law-and-order ticket. The brothers railed against a post-communist order that favored networks of ex-apparatchiks over ordinary Poles. As EU skeptics and critics of anything-goes capitalism, they called for a "solidarity based" economy rather than a "liberal" one. Their staunch Catholic credentials—against abortion, gay rights, euthanasia and secular schooling—won them the backing of the powerful Catholic far-right Radio Maryja. By partnering with the Catholic-nationalist League of Polish Families and the agrarian radicals of Self-Defense, rather than the center-right options available to them, the Kaczynskis began an unparalleled assault on the Third Republic.

With Jaroslaw in the prime minister's office and Lech as president, the administration went to work "fixing," in its view, a judiciary that let former Communists off scot-free, a media that defiled Polish morality and a school system that slighted patriotic heroes. The twosome and their militant junior partners threw one spanner after another into the works of the EU and lashed out at Germany for "reversing moral responsibility for the effects of World War II." One of the government's early moves was to call for an investigation of gay groups for illegal financing, criminal connections and pedophilia. Although the coalition fell apart in late 2007, the Polish experience shows how quickly populists can rise to power and how dangerous they can be in wielding it, influencing even European integration.

The hour of Hungary's populists is at hand, and their rise illustrates the success of parties that are able to shift nimbly with the political winds. Over the years, Fidesz has transformed itself from laissez-faire liberal to law-and-order nationalist to *völkisch* conservative and then back again, all the while maintaining a veneer of "center right" respectability abroad. Like most successful parties, Fidesz revolves around a charismatic frontman: Viktor Orbán, founder of Fidesz, originally a youth party that emerged from dissident circles at Budapest's law school in the late 1980s. I remember him well from the time, a fresh-faced boy wonder bursting with energy to modernize Hungary. The iconic Fidesz poster from the 1990 election still hangs on my wall. It shows former Soviet and East German leaders Leonid Brezhnev and Erich Honecker locked in an awkward smooch, and below it a young Hungarian couple kissing. "Choose one," the caption reads.

But the Fidesz of today bears little resemblance to that of 1990. In government (1982–2002) as in opposition, Orbán has transformed Hungary's political scene with his power plays, dividing it into hostile camps defined by rabble-rousing and cheap shots. In nonelection years, Fidesz used popular referendums and street protests to rally the disillusioned against the Socialist government. In 2006 Orbán was at the front of a huge demo that besieged Parliament demanding the government's resignation, a watershed event for both Fidesz and Jobbik at a time when the two were allied (once it was clear that Fidesz had swept the latest election, Orbán promptly shifted to the center, professing his devotion to Christian democracy and blasting Jobbik's extremism). Orbán-style nationalism has many targets: the Slovaks; "foreign investors" with opaque, non-Hungarian interests; and Communist holdovers who betray the Magyar people. The Socialist government was the easiest target, as the economy had plunged during its eight-year rule and corruption proliferated, while Transparency International ranked Hungary's graft on a par with that of Bahrain and Cape Verde, worse than Costa Rica and the United Arab Emirates.

By occupying the center with these issues, Fidesz shifted Hungary's entire political discourse to the right, opening the way for even less savory outfits like Jobbik, which picks up where Orbán leaves off with explicit anti-Semitism and hate speech against Roma and immigrants. Jobbik, originally a university-based working group under Fidesz's wing, burst onto the scene in 2004 with an anti-Europe, Greater Hungary platform and a paramilitary arm that marched through downtown Budapest in neo-Nazi garb until it was banned. But even after its prohibition, black-clad, jackbooted members of the Magyar Garda can be seen in "Judapest," as they call it. Across Europe, splinter parties exist with far-right visions like Jobbik's, but only in Hungary do they attract young, educated, urban voters on such a scale.

The right's breadth and impact on Europe was nowhere more evident than in the spring 2009 European Parliament vote. In addition to Jobbik, Slovak, Romanian, Latvian and Bulgarian ultranationalists entered the Brussels legislature, as did more

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familiar faces, including France's National Front, Italy's anti-immigration Northern League, the British National Party and Austria's Freedom Party. Western Europe's rightists have profited enormously from EU enlargement, banding together with the ragtag populists of Central Europe to form factions that qualify for EU funds. The EU is flummoxed by ever more MPs in its midst who despise everything it stands for. Its powers to sanction are extremely limited; full expulsion of members is possible only in egregious cases. The Europe-wide Social Democrats reacted to Fico's election in Slovakia by suspending his party from their ranks, only to later invite it back in. When the Freedom Party of Austria's right-wing superstar Jörg Haider joined a conservative government there in 2000, the Union was equally at a loss. After all, the new government had come to power in a democratic election. And the Fidesz-led Hungary will be particularly difficult to admonish: it takes over the EU Council presidency in 2011.

In fact, the EU is part of a larger problem. As many Central Europeans see it, the painful reforms required for EU admission have failed to result in better wages, living standards, jobs or other opportunities. The nature of the full-throttle market transitions made their economies particularly vulnerable to the global financial crisis, which has pounded them much harder than it has most of Western Europe. Since faraway Brussels is notoriously hard to strike back at, voters punish the liberal-oriented elites who championed EU membership as a fast track to prosperity. No thinking person can fail to grasp the vast discrepancy in wealth between Central and Western Europe, on the one hand, and between the haves and have-nots in every post-communist country, on the other. This, combined with corruption and the blunders of inexperience, have seriously diminished the public's faith in democratic politics. The populists thus enjoy an open field, posing as elite-slayers and saviors of the nation in the face of Europe's (and globalization's) steady assault. Observers say the key to Fidesz's and Jobbik's success was not Jew- or Roma-baiting but the parties' relentless attacks on the status quo.

Legitimate disillusionment with the political class would appear to be auspicious grounds for leftist or social democratic alternatives, but the fact is, they don't exist in Central Europe. With the exception of the Czech Republic, Latvia and now Hungary (the upstart Politics Can Be Different Party took 7 percent of the vote, the flicker of light in the recent elections), there isn't a green party in the parliaments from Estonia to Bulgaria. Parties that call themselves social democratic or democratic socialist usually bear the pedigree of cold war–era communist parties. Although many of them have reinvented themselves and now include a fresh generation of cadre, most still bear the top-down mentality of their forefathers and are not beneath tapping nationalism and populism themselves.

Central Europe's politics are dominated by these reformed communist parties on one side and national populists on the other, with a very slim liberal middle to stand up for ecology, a democratized EU, civil society and the rights of the disenfranchised, like Roma, gays, ethnic minorities, sex workers and immigrants. To be sure, there are independent civic groups that take these stands, but they are themselves regularly the focus of populist ire. No political force in the Central European landscape poses a credible alternative to the neoliberal economic strategies that seemed to Central Europeans to hold all the answers in the 1990s.

In the worst cases, prejudice spills over into violence. Gay-bashing happens everywhere in Central Europe, as do periodic attacks on synagogues. But the most frequent victims are the Roma. The European Roma Rights Center in Budapest claims that Roma children in Central Europe regularly attend segregated schools or classes. Assaults on the 5 million Roma and Sinti have come in waves since communism fell. Since 2008 in Hungary alone, Roma communities have experienced at least nine arson attacks, eight shootings and two hand-grenade assaults. Some nine people have been killed. The ERRC blames an increasingly racist climate across the region, to which local authorities have turned a blind eye. EU human rights committees condemned the violence, which had no impact other than to provide additional fodder to the populists, who link Brussels with Hungary-bashing and Roma rights. As Bulgarian sociologist Ivan Krastev puts it, "In the rhetoric of populist parties, elites and Roma are twins: neither is like 'us'; both steal and rob from the honest majority; neither pays the taxes that it should pay; and both are supported by foreigners—Brussels in particular."

Western Europe's rightists have profited enormously from EU enlargement, banding together with the ragtag populists of Central Europe.

In Western Europe, the impetus to transform the arch-conservative political culture of the 1950s came not from the establishment but from below: from students, intellectuals, artists and other nonconformists. The Central Europeans never really had a '68-style cultural revolution—Soviet tanks made sure of that. Nor was there a rigorous coming to terms with the twentieth century's interwar and wartime nationalisms, as post-war Germany has done with its ignominious past. This enables nationalists to call upon illiberal traditions from the 1930s and '40s to underpin contemporary nationalism. Perhaps most worrisome of all is the youngest generation's attraction to these ideas. It is this polyglot, Internet-savvy cohort that is supposed to lead these countries well into the twenty-first century and beyond.

Although the Central Europeans didn't have a Western-style 1968, they did have 1989, when people power and a spirit of civic responsibility prevailed over entrenched dictatorships. That spirit carried into the early 1990s, then petered out as the grind of economic transition and democracy's frustrations exposed the less glamorous side of liberalism. The exhilarating legacy of 1989 is, however, still there to draw on, and the progressive answer to Central Europe's pretenders lies there, not in the mantra that with the free market and EU stewardship everything will be for the best. ■

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Needed: A Progressive Story

Instead of an endless platform of policy ideas, progressives need to tell a shared narrative.

by AMITAI ETZIONI

In preparing for the 2010 midterm elections, we need a progressive summit, to compose a shared narrative and shared positions. Currently, progressive groups are pulling in different directions, favoring distinct tactics, promoting their own rationales. True, despite all the talk about a "progressive movement," there is no way to cobble the various progressive groups into one coherent force. However, one can find what political philosophers call "overlapping consensuses." That is, instead of seeking one agreed-upon platform and strategy, progressives should identify major points all can agree to promote. Participants in the new coalition would understand that many of their agenda items would not be supported actively by many of the groups involved—and, in turn, they would not be expected to promote the entire agendas of other groups. Each group in the coalition would avoid adding its desiderata to the common pile, making it unwieldy and apolitical. Only those items all groups favor will be accommodated: above all, a shared narrative and a shared strategy.

TIM ROBINSON

The Missing Narrative

Successful movements have a narrative that usually takes a historical form. The narrative provides an account of the forces that got us into our predicament and the rising forces that will save us, and an image of the more perfect union we are going to reach once we put our shoulders to the wheel.

The most effective narratives follow the same pattern, one that is found in the Bible and in Marx. Once, we were in a state of grace (the Garden of Eden, the early commune); we sinned (took a bite from the forbidden apple, technological developments advanced a new ruling class); we must atone for our sins (pray, organize); and we will return to nirvana (the Garden of Eden, a stateless commune). Call it the U-turn of the human narrative. (Obama followed this script when he pointed out, during his first State of the Union address, that in 2000 we had a budget surplus; we were doing well. He then found a great deficit on entering the White House and was forced to increase it some; we sinned. But he promised to lead us back to virtue, by lowering the deficit. Not a very ennobling and a rather minor narrative, but one that conforms to the tried-and-true pattern.)

I could not agree more with Katrina vanden Heuvel and Robert L. Borosage ("Change Won't Come Easy," Feb. 1) that we need to pay more mind to values and ideals and less to policy-wonking. Narratives are a way to explore values and ideas, often in a historical (real or imagined) context, or in the form of an evocative allegory that reaches people who would not join a policy debate even if all football games were canceled and all the soaps were turned off.

Conservatives have two such narratives that have been highly successful. This is of much importance because, for decades, there have been at least two self-declared conservatives for every American who identifies as a liberal. According to the economically conservative and libertarian narrative, the United States was doing well until the government expanded, first under Franklin Roosevelt and then in the 1960s. Cutting it down will solve our problems. Social conservatives hold that American society was doing well until the sexual revolution of the 1960s. If we just return to the good old days, when divorce was restricted, abortions were illegal, etc., virtuous America would be restored.

The fact that these narratives are terribly familiar is a reflection of their strength. To conservatives, they need not be spelled out or justified. They are taken as established truths. Moreover, they provide a ready-made context for numerous specific positions.

When I recently scoured the major progressive publications and interviewed a few progressive leaders, I could not find a progressive narrative. I was somewhat prepared for this finding, given that the movement includes groups with different agendas, such as gay, environmental and minority groups. What did surprise me was that, as far as I could determine, not a single one of these groups had a streamlined narrative of its own, one that at least most of its members shared—and that might be shared by others.

What I did find were platformlike statements, replete with hortatory goals—for instance, that "all people should have equal opportunity in life, that all children should be able to go to good schools, and that everyone should have health care" (*Mother Jones*), or that "all persons should have the rights and opportunity to benefit equally from the resources afforded us by society and the environment" (the Green Party).

Statements like these reflect the noble aspirations and sentiments of their authors but have all the mobilizing power of a sleeping pill. They provide no narrative, no explanation of why we are in such dire straits or how we must liberate ourselves. Even the few I found were too nuanced or contested to provide an effective counter to conservative narratives. *The American Prospect* calls for "committed, engaged progressives—realistic but committed to the idea that there is greater range

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for genuinely transformative policies than is often imagined." It's a noble notion but not exactly a road map. Ditto for "We believe in the great American traditions of civic responsibility, caring for the down and out, and giving the average person a break…" (*Washington Monthly*). Bill Moyers put it well, in remarks reprinted in *The Nation*, when he responded to a long list of desired items provided by a progressive leader: "But America needs something more right now than a 'must-do' list from liberals and progressives. America needs a different story" ("For America's Sake," January 22, 2007).

True, a diligent reader can find other relevant and sophisticated statements and analyses, but they are hardly as shared within the progressive camp as the conservative narratives are on the other side of the aisle.

Hence, the first task of the progressive movement is to compose a shared narrative. It must include a characterization of who bedevils us: Is it the military-industrial complex? Wall Street? Capitalism? The Christian right? Or…? Who will save us: A rainbow coalition of minorities, feminists and labor unions? A new third party, à la Nader? A youth movement of the kind that served as the core of the Obama election? Or…? And—last but not least: What is the end state we are aspiring to bring about? What is our shining city?

More Than Labels and Networks

Narratives are not to be confused with communication devices or strategies. Often when a movement runs into strong opposition, it is reluctant to examine its key message and tends to assume that the main problem is that the message was not well communicated. Hence the quest for more articulate leaders (like Reagan, Clinton and the master of them all, Barack Obama), liberal antidotes to Rush Limbaugh (like Rachel Maddow) and the emphasis on building networks online.

Special attention is paid to finding new labels. Thus, many Democrats believe that the GOP did well by calling the estate tax a "death tax." Democrats rushed to embrace such ideas as those advanced by George Lakoff, who holds that people will support Democrats' tax increases—once they are called "investments." Such rebranding has its place, but it cannot carry the day if the underlying message is off, and surely if there is none.

Others believe that tweeting, texting and social networking will do the trick, that—in more old-fashioned terminology—the medium is the message. As I see it, improving communication is important, but it cannot be a substitute for having an effective core of ideas, woven into a narrative, to communicate.

A French Lesson?

If a narrative is so important, readers may ask, why don't you unfurl one? As I see it, the much-needed narrative must arise out of a dialogue among the main progressive thinkers and representatives—because in the process they will have to modify their positions, not necessarily to move closer to one another, but rather toward a new common ground. When I convened several Christian thinkers and left-leaning progressive leaders to talk about sex education, I could not have foreseen that they would agree on "education for intimacy," a new approach that opposes separating sex education from values education—but makes the central value responsibility for the consequences of one's act (rather than "saving yourself for marriage"). Similarly, few would have expected that when abortion rights advocates and opponents got together, they would fashion a joint program: they sought to make adoption easier and improve childcare. Indeed, as I see it, to present a narrative not based on dialogue is to invite rejection.

Still, one may ask for a dialogue-starter. Mine draws on a combination of the deliberations of the young Karl Marx and psychologist Abraham Maslow. Society progresses to the extent that it moves from one centered on labor, to one centered on work, to one that nurtures self-actualization. In the early days of industrialization (a stage emerging economies are still in), most people had to labor in jobs that were highly alienating to provide for basic sustenance. However, as these needs were met—initially for some classes and not others—we were able to move to work that is inherently satisfying and gradually to the kind that made more room for social and spiritual pursuits. However, we continue to be caught up in an economic system built around labor, one that makes a fetish out of long hours and the massive use of consumer goods to express affection, gain esteem and to self-actualize.

We need to transition to a society in which the privileged classes limit labor and consumption, making room for social and spiritual pursuits.

We need to make a transition to a society in which the privileged classes limit labor and consumption and make more room for social and spiritual pursuits. Such a society would be much more open to significant reallocation of wealth from those whose basic needs are met to those who still are lacking, as the first group will no longer find additional satisfaction from earning still more—and will seek to invest themselves in pursuits that are neither labor- nor capital-intensive, for instance, spending more time with their children. In this way, unprivileged classes will be able to catch up.

The last point is particularly likely to be contested because many do not buy what I take for granted—that democratic societies cannot engage in major reallocation of wealth unless one finds a rationale that will lead the privileged classes to go along with such reallocation. As I see it, almost by definition, those in power cannot be forced, but can be motivated, as many children of the rich are, "to do good." One may ask why we should delay reducing the labor-consumption load on the less endowed. Indeed, in an ideal society they too should be able to enjoy the full measure of the good life immediately. However, the sad fact is that they must first be brought to the point at which their basic needs are met before they can concentrate on attending to their higher needs.

A society that is moving to dedicate ever more of its indi-

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vidual and collective energy to higher needs turns out, rather importantly, to also be much more sustainable, environmentally friendly and favorable to climate change mitigation than capitalism, precisely because it is not labor- or capital-intensive.

French society provides a limited model of liberating society: a shorter workweek than that of the United States, Britain and even Germany; a willingness to accept at the same time a somewhat lower income per capita—that is, a lower level of work and less consumption of material goods and services. This in turn makes room for greater "investment" in social and spiritual activities. Indeed, France's strong network of social services (especially childcare) protected the French from the brunt of the recent economic crisis. It is far from an ideal society, but it provides a preliminary illustration of the kind of society to which I am pointing. Its main shortcomings are that France relies heavily on the state for functions best carried out by communities and voluntary associations, and its commitment to individual rights is far from what it ought to be.

The main enemies of the good society are those who promote the commodification of life, the promotion of consumer goods (and the hard labor that acquiring them requires), as the mainstay of the good life rather than as a source that can be capped for serving basic needs. The main supporters of the good society are those who champion a moderate form of the counterculture, not one that opts out from the work and consumption life but that moves beyond it once one's basic needs are met. Already close to this position are various green groups, several moderate religious groups and select public intellectuals. Those groups that seek to secure their basic needs that have not yet been served—minority groups and some labor unions—also can find their place in this agenda. The goals of groups that champion individual rights—such as the ACLU, NARAL and LGBT groups—are compatible with the good society because they do not promote commodification, and they benefit more from citizens who are available for public action than from those enslaved by high-labor, high-consumption societies. Finally, groups like Common Cause should find their place here, as campaign contributions are the main way corporations and marketers maintain a grip on our public life.

Forming a shared progressive narrative will serve the movement in the longer run. For now, attention must be focused on the election. As I see it, if each group will seek to support the election of those that champion its wish list—repeal "don't ask, don't tell," ban offshore oil drilling and so on—we will do much less well than if all the groups work hard to elect those that favor a few shared items. Jobs would lead my list, right next to even stronger and truly enforced regulation of Wall Street. Such a drive is likelier to deliver a Congress more supportive of specific agendas of the various groups than a campaign that makes them the centerpiece. Let's elect generic progressives rather than special interest ones. ■

Letters

(continued from page 2)

Overland Park, Kan.

"Disposable Soldiers" was absolutely heartbreaking. How could this man, wounded in combat, not only be misdiagnosed but treated in a manner unbefitting a human being? To hear that his superiors' careers "flourished" after this incident is unacceptable. I hope someone with more clout than me can help these soldiers. At least *The Nation* is listening.
Kathleen Morales

Allen, Tex.

These pre-existing personality disorder discharges: they did the exact same thing to me! I have all the documents to prove it but have not found any attorneys with the courage to help.
Phillip Pope

New York City

There is no such diagnosis as an "adult onset personality disorder," as Army doctors have alleged in the case of Sgt. Chuck Luther. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* makes this clear. Sergeant Luther's symptoms are classic signs of traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It's troubling to think that he, a decorated soldier who has proven himself in combat, would be deemed ineligible for benefits.
Robert Lichtman, PhD
Professor of psychology
John Jay College of Criminal Justice

Brooklyn, N.Y.

As a clinical psychologist who trained in the Veterans Administration, I am particularly chagrined to read of the abuse of diagnostic practices that Joshua Kors describes. Personality disorder is not one diagnosis but rather a category of diagnoses, with extremely broad manifestations. The assertions of certitude by the doctors who labeled Sergeant Luther with "personality disorder" would be laughable were their consequences not so tragic.
Margaret Hornick, PhD

Danielson, Conn.

If doctors found them fit for duty at enlistment time, then they were either lying at discharge or incompetent. The doctors should be dealt with accordingly—i.e., discharged with no benefits.
Warren E. Smith

Columbia, Mo.

I was a sergeant in the 82nd Airborne, one of the first deployed to Iraq. When we were clearing out of the country, there was a lot of paperwork to fill out. Most of it was crap, and most of us were more than happy to sign anything just to get out of there.

But there was one document that was very important. It asked, "Have you ever fired your weapon at a combatant? Have you ever taken fire? Did you at any time fear for your life?" Ninety-nine percent of us checked yes. Then, as they gathered up the forms, they gave us this gem of wisdom: "In case any of you want to change your answers, remember this: there is a two-month backlog to see the mental health providers. If you checked yes, you will be held here for two months before you are allowed to leave. But if you fill out a new form, I am sure we will be able to clear you out of here with no issues."

Every single one of us filled out a new form and left the country. This comes back to bite you in the ass if you later seek help from the VA for PTSD. I'm thankful for reporters like Joshua Kors who get the word out. I hope we can get the government to own up to these shady, underhanded tactics.
Daniel A. Clark

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Books & the Arts.

CHRIS PAYNE

Bridge to Infirmary Ward, Taunton State Hospital, Massachusetts (2002)

Job's Comforters

by ADAM PHILLIPS

When Alfred Adler, one of Freud's early followers, saw a patient for an initial consultation, he would take a history and ask the patient to give an account of what he was suffering from, in the traditional medical way, and then, right at the end, he would say to the patient, "What would you do if you were cured?" The patient would answer, and Adler would say, "Well, go and do it then." The patient is assumed to know what he wants, to know what his preferred life is, and his illness is the way he has inhibited himself. The problem, in this sense, is a pragmatic one: the patient knows what he wants; the only problem is how to get it, how to successfully negotiate the obstacle course of desire. The patient's symptoms are self-imposed obstacles. The patient assumes that were he to get what he wants, he would feel better, but he has made himself into an incompetent hedonist. In this deprivation model of so-called mental illness, life is about doing what you can to get whatever you feel is lacking in your life. We are ill either when we are unable to do this or, worse, when we no longer believe in it. People who are depressed, as Gary Greenberg makes abundantly clear in his lucid and unusually revealing book *Manufacturing Depression*, are the casualties or critics (or both) of this modern view that life is there for the taking, if only we can find a way—that unhappiness is a form of inefficiency.

This is, of course, a very upbeat view of mental illness, because it presumes, first, that what we want, what will make us feel

Adam Phillips is a practicing psychoanalyst. His essay collection On Balance *is forthcoming from Farrar, Straus and Giroux.*

Manufacturing Depression
The Secret History of a Modern Disease.
By Gary Greenberg.
Simon & Schuster. 432 pp. $27.

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better, is there (i.e., there's no scarcity); and second, that wanting works, that the ways we have evolved of getting what we want are competent (i.e., there's nothing intrinsically difficult, nothing essentially conflictual about wanting); and third, that we are good at knowing what we want, good at knowing what's best for us (i.e., because we know who and what we are, we know what makes us happy). Each of these presumptions that masquerade as assumptions is obviously contentious. But the many people who discuss these issues—and they are discussed both implicitly and explicitly with shrewd tact by Greenberg in this book—don't always know that people who are depressed live as if none of this is even plausible. Is there something wrong with them? Is there perhaps something wrong with someone if he is suffering at all? And what are we trying to do to suffering when we redescribe it as illness, rather than as something else? Is something an illness, for example, if there is a drug for it? And if there is a drug for something, does that make it an illness? Is all suffering an illness now, and is all illness defined as something we want a drug for? Science has been one of the very few things that have helped us believe in progress, but, not surprisingly, it hasn't exactly made a breakthrough with mental illness.

Is all suffering an illness now, and is all illness defined as something we want a drug for?

"A good science story," Greenberg writes, "can make you feel even better about progress and the prospects for humankind," but it has become increasingly obvious that the story of antidepressants, not to mention many other wonder drugs of the pharmaceutical industry, may be a bad science story that will make us feel even worse about progress and the prospects for humankind than we do already. Depression, as Greenberg's title indicates, may have been manufactured, by which he means described in a way that made it the "target" for certain kinds of treatment. Depression was "an enormous market opportunity," he writes, "for an industry that would aim its magic bullets at insanity." As Greenberg knows, a lot is at stake, and not only money, in the medical treatment of depression; around 30 million Americans take antidepressants, and the World Health Organization has claimed that depression is "the leading cause of disability" and the fourth "leading contributor to the global burden of disease." We may not be able to stave off for much longer a catastrophic disillusionment about what science can do for what it insists on calling mental illness for its own good and bad reasons. What is at stake, Greenberg writes, when we begin to think of our unhappiness as a disease is "who we are, what kind of people we want to be, what we think it means to be human."

If the anti-psychiatrists of the 1960s and '70s—most notably R.D. Laing and Thomas Szasz—were up against the scapegoating of the mentally ill as people akin to political dissidents, people in possession of unruly truths, then the new critics of psychiatry, who do not idealize mental illness, are up against the money-makers, the drug companies and doctors who, in the name of science, exploit so-called "mental illness" for profit. Greenberg, a practicing psychotherapist and, as he reports so eloquently in this book, a patient with depression, wants to renew our sense that mental illness is one of the ways we make meaning, not one of the ways we fail to. *Manufacturing Depression*, that is to say, is part of a new backlash against scientific psychiatry. Science can be disproved only by its own criteria; when it comes to mental illness, its own criteria are often insufficient.

You don't need to be anti-science to believe that in certain areas of our lives there has been a confusion of realms; that it has never been a question of whether scientific method is a good thing but of what it is good for, of how it gets us the lives we want and how it doesn't. If your child dies, no amount of scientific explanation will make you feel better. If you get an infection, antibiotics will probably work. Depressed people may be more like people for whom someone (or something) has died (or has not been able to live) than people who have an infection. At its most minimal, how we read the signs, what we see our suffering as, what we describe it as being like, have fateful consequences. Scientists sometimes want us to believe that the evidence speaks for itself, but evidence is never self-evident; people often disagree both about what counts as evidence and what evidence is evidence of. It is as though, now, the cult of evidence—of "evidence-based research"—is the only alternative to the cults of religion. But the sciences, like the arts, like religions, are forms of interpretation, of people making something out of their experience. And our ideas about health, mental or otherwise, are just another way of talking about what a good life is for us, what we can make of it and what we can't. What Greenberg wants us to know and to remember is that "the depression doctors, and their drug company sponsors, have overstepped with us. They don't know any better than you and I what life is for or how we are supposed to feel about it."

If this is another version of Max Weber's irrefutable remark in *Science as a Vocation*—"Science presupposes that what is produced by scientific work should be important in the sense of being 'worth knowing.' And it is obvious that all our problems lie here, for this presupposition cannot be proved by scientific means"—it also demonstrates Greenberg's characteristic evenhandedness. Or rather, what distinguishes *Manufacturing Depression* is that Greenberg never needs to take the upper hand. In the story he has to tell, which is a useful history of psychiatric diagnoses of depression interwoven with a riveting account of his own depression and his participation in an antidepressant drug trial, he doesn't assume—as the historians of madness and the anti-psychiatrists have been prone to do—that the depression doctors and their drug-company sponsors have straightforwardly got it wrong. Nor does he in any way minimize the scandalous complicity of the psychiatric profession and the drug companies, and the ways in which they have made false claims about their drugs and how they work.

They haven't straightforwardly got it wrong because depression, possibly like all so-called mental illness, is not the kind of thing you can be right about in the way you can be right about a broken arm. A broken life has many aspects to it, because to fail at one thing is always to succeed at another. Knowing better what life is for and what we are supposed to feel about it is one of the most interesting questions we can explore; it's only a problem, at least for liberals, when we need other people to agree with our answers (madness, the psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott once remarked, is the need to be believed; liberals attempt to conciliate rival claims). For Greenberg, the problem with depression doctors and their accomplices is not that they are wrong but that they need to narrow our minds to sell their product, that they have got the answer only if no one else has. When the best cure needs to describe itself as the only cure, what the liberal wants to know is what has happened to the competition. Once antidepressants became the only game in town, it was no longer a town; it was only a game.

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It is not Greenberg's way to be illiberal, so he wants us to be skeptical of those, like many of the depression doctors, who will not allow us our skepticism; he hopes we will not use our will to trust to endanger ourselves. He wants us to curb our childish passion to let other people speak on our behalf, and given that's what modern politics is, choosing or not choosing people to speak on our behalf, there is a sense in which Greenberg's book is both liberal and antipolitical. "I suppose I'll never know," he writes by way of conclusion, "whose story is the right one. But I know what mine is, and I'm sticking to it for now. The greatest injustice that Eliphaz and his friends inflicted on Job was that they refused to let him have his version of events. That's what the depression doctors want to do to you."

Job's comforters, or sticking to your guns. The plot, as Greenberg knows, is always thicker than this, because one's own version has always been informed by the versions of many others, and one's own version always meets somebody else's. It is a terrible thing not to be able or not to be allowed to have one's own version, and it is a terrible thing to have only one's own version. If one's own version is that one's life is not worth living, as anybody might feel some of the time and some depressed people can feel most of the time—or, indeed, that life itself is not worth living—why, let alone how, could one be dissuaded? This, at least, Greenberg's book allows us to consider. We can't help but ask, since *Manufacturing Depression* is such a stirring defense of and testament to the value of each person having his own version of events, and having it taken seriously, which version of events would be absolutely unacceptable to Greenberg? At which point in the conversation would he call the doctor or the police? All the available mental health treatments are inevitably complicit, to varying degrees, with the forms of discipline and punishment in operation in their societies. The depression doctors and the pharmaceutical industry have regressed, in Greenberg's view, to the late-nineteenth-century psychiatry of Kraepelin and his followers—"the important biography, then, was not of the patient…but of the disease"—in order to silence and confine the seriously unhappy. To rob them, essentially, of the story of their lives, and to make them pay for this as though it were a service.

In this sense, whatever else it is—and it is an interesting book about many things—*Manufacturing Depression* is a book about liberal democracy, which allows people the freedom to tell competing stories, and the scientific rather than religious forces that threaten to undermine it. It is also a book that shows us how deeply wedded all the talking cures—the nonmedical mental health treatments—are to the defense of liberal democracy rather than, as they once were, to a more radical politics. (Fantasies of liberation are not what they were.) "You can tell your own story about your discontents," Greenberg writes, "and my guess is that it will be better than the one that the depression doctors have manufactured." It's when therapies don't err on the side of guessing games, and don't acknowledge that this is what they are, that they become dangerous. The only therapies we should trust are the enemies of militant competence. *Manufacturing Depression* is an unusually amusing, moving and spirited account of why this is true, and of what we might be doing to ourselves by not believing it. ■

No Imagination

by BARRY SCHWABSKY

It seems to be axiomatic that the titles of books and exhibitions on Nordic painting—not that there are many in the Anglophone world—must include the word "light." In recent decades we have seen (or overlooked, as the case may be) *Northern Light*, *In Another Light*, *Baltic Light* and *The Triumph of Light and Nature*. The current exhibition at the National Gallery in London reaffirms the convention. On view through June 13, "Christen Købke: Danish Master of Light" is the first exhibition of Købke's work outside his native land, but he comes trailing a strong local reputation as the greatest painter of Denmark's so-called Golden Age, by which is broadly meant the first half of the nineteenth century, the heyday of Søren Kierkegaard and Hans Christian Andersen. In fact, in painting at least, the Golden Age was coterminous with the period from 1818, when Købke's teacher C.W. Eckersberg was appointed professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, and 1848, the year of Købke's death, at 37.

Don't let the phrase "Golden Age" fool you. Truth in labeling would compel us to follow Fritz Novotny and use the term commonly applied to Austrian and German art of the era: Danish Biedermeier. As David Jackson points out in his thorough and illuminating exhibition catalog, this age was golden only insofar as the Danes had more or less successfully adjusted to expectations severely diminished by the period of political and military calamity that had opened the century. The second half of the eighteenth century had been a period of rising prosperity, but during the Napoleonic era an alliance with France proved to be Denmark's undoing; in 1801 its vaunted navy was crushed by Admiral Nelson, and in 1807 British bombardment flattened Copenhagen. Runaway inflation ensued, leading to the nation's bankruptcy in 1813 and political deflation the following year, when Denmark lost control of Norway. By 1820 a popular poet could un-self-consciously, if self-pityingly, write, "Denmark is a small, impoverished land."

This was the country into which Købke was born in 1810. His father was a master baker who supplied (and, with his family, lived in) the military citadel on the outskirts of Copenhagen; growing up in this environment, the boy must have been well aware that his father was serving a diminished power. He was not yet 12 when he was admitted to the Academy, which had been established the century before on the French model, with a strictly neoclassical program. The appointment of Eckersberg, a onetime student of Jacques-Louis David, must have seemed like a way of keeping art education in safe hands, but Eckersberg had ideas of his own. With little sympathy for the heroic brand of history painting that was the acme of academic art, he successfully applied his austerely classical approach to composition to the "lower" genres of portraiture and landscape. Denying the hierarchy of genres, he exhorted painters simply to "paint from nature, no matter what it might be, farmhouses, churches, castles, trees, plants or animals, in short whatever is there." Eckersberg's landscapes, as Jackson notes—"closely observed, detailed, disarmingly natural, yet set in an idealised, tranquil light that lends the scene a curious mixture of stillness and astonishing realism, rather as if time has been suspended"—set the tone for Golden Age painting, and in particular that of Købke.

Købke was a prodigy. He painted many of the works for which he is most renowned when he was in his 20s—between 1830, when he was still a student of Eckersberg's,

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and 1838, when he embarked on the Italian journey that was de rigueur for any serious artist of the time; his subsequent work is thought to be much less consistent in quality, although a visitor to the tightly selected show of some fifty works at the National Gallery will notice no particular falling off. But just as no one at the time spoke of a Golden Age—the label was first applied in the 1890s—so no one at the time pegged Købke as a standout. He was one more earnest striver, and less successful than many.

Many of Købke's portraits depict fellow artists; most of the rest are of his family and everyday acquaintances, such as the cigar vendor who kept a stand outside the Citadel. This narrow focus on his own circle suggests that commissions were scarce for Købke, but the benefit for us is that it makes the exhibition feel less like an introduction to an individual artist than to a milieu. In the single self-portrait, from 1833, the young man's bright, serious face and charming red cheeks shine out incongruously from the dour brown background; it's as though he knows that the particular sort of seriousness he's been endowed with is not quite in sync with his own idea of what counts as ambition. A depiction from the year before of his studio mate Frederik Sødring, however, is quite different. Købke's fellow painter looks equally callow but in a different way; slouched in a chair in the brightly lighted studio, holding his palette on his forearm as nonchalantly as a waiter on break still toying with his empty tray, he has something of the joker about him.

But while Sødring is slouching, Købke certainly isn't; the sense of equiponderant attentiveness in the painting is astonishing. Everything is seen with precision yet without pedantic fuss. Such a subtle orchestration of the multitude of discrete units of texture, color and tone in this painting could only be the product of an extraordinary intuitive intellect. But if the portrait conveys a certain psychological penetration as well, it is because Købke has revealed Sødring's character with seeming inadvertence. His soul remains his secret, utterly hidden behind his physical presence in the world (along with the high-spirited color of the painting, which seems to belong to the sitter more than to the portraitist). But the artist has conveyed the sense of that presence with rare simplicity, and by doing nothing other than presenting the complex fact of Sødring's face, and its nuance of expression, in the same unassuming way he presents the fact of the houseplant in the pot to Sødring's right (part of the studio mates' still-life setup) or his gorgeous black silk vest or the complex reflections in the mirror behind and above his head.

The artists at loose ends who populate much of Købke's portraiture have not yet formed a bohemia, as their ilk in Paris would shortly be doing, but we can discern its seeds in them; nor has their disaffection hardened into the determined rebelliousness of an avant-garde. Købke may have been the least arty among them. You'd never catch him with a rose between his teeth, as he depicted the painter Wilhelm Marstrand. "A creative genius he hardly has," observed Niels Laurits Høyen, the first Danish art historian, on meeting Købke in 1831. Some sixty years later the author of the first monograph on Købke put it even more strongly: "He was born without any creative imagination." Yet just as William Blake said that if the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise, so Købke, by persisting in his literal-mindedness, revealed a deeper imaginativeness than his more romantically inclined colleagues. Likewise, he might have shown his countrymen, had they been more interested in looking, how their "small, impoverished land," shorn of heroic ambitions, looks in a more essential light.

There's nothing mystical about Købke's light—no reaching for the sublime. Still, its typical clarity—which seems to carve the edges of things with such meticulousness but not too much polish, so that one seems to feel the grain of the surface with one's eyes—made him an extraordinary painter of landscape and architecture. And just as his portraits constitute a gallery of familiars, yet depicted with an inquisitive objectivity that never takes familiarity for granted, so his landscape (except during his Italian journey) is the one that was closest to him. It's said that he avoided working anyplace from which he couldn't get home in time for dinner. Yet he rarely settled for an obvious angle on the places he knew so well. Views are often oddly framed in a manner that might be called protophotographic.

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View From Dosseringen Near the Sortedam Lake Looking Towards Nørrebro (1838), by Christen Købke

Perhaps the strangest, most oblique and most fascinating of Købke's landscapes is a seemingly unassuming little one called *View From a Window in Toldbodvej Looking Towards the Citadel*, circa 1833. The view is from the studio Købke shared with Sødring, Jackson informs us, and toward the military settlement in which he'd grown up. The picture is mostly of sky, rendered with rapt attentiveness to cloud formations, soft as rose petals, and their effects on the modulation of light, but with no bravura. One sees a bit of the intervening terrain across the bottom of the canvas—tops of trees, what is presumably the wall of the Citadel, a windmill, a church, all tiny in the distance—but that's not all. Running like a strip along the very bottom of the paintings is the top of a neighboring roof; from it, the blocky form of a stone chimney rises up against the sky. There's something almost

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shocking about that chimney, about the way it imposes itself so bluntly and with such seeming randomness. The chimney is like an amateur photographer's thumb caught in a snapshot, a seemingly random interruption; but it is hardly that, because it has been rendered with the utmost meticulousness. Its smallness makes the sky in this tiny painting seem immense. Købke used a similar device in a much grander painting, *Roof Ridge of Frederiksborg Castle, With View of Lake, Town and Forest*, c. 1834–35, but the small one packs as much punch as the large.

This may be the most radical example of how Købke's matter-of-factness admits compositionally disturbing elements and converts them into a focus of the composition, but far from the only one. For this reason it seems misleading to speak, as Jackson does, of the "picturesque idealism in Købke's unassuming work." The picturesque seems beautiful because it already looks as if it's a picture before it's even been painted; a work like *View From a Window in Toldbodvej Looking Towards the Citadel* shows just how indifferent Købke could be toward this kind of prepictured beauty. And "unassuming" doesn't seem right either: in what sense can a painting that unfolds so much space from within itself be considered modest? I see a huge ambition, cunningly dissembled. Surreptitiously, *View From a Window* would dominate any room in which it was hung.

Købke paints the presence of things—buildings, faces—as the presence of enigma.

This veiled ambition, or inconspicuous power, is the essential paradox of this unimaginative, unintellectual and unworldly artist, and it's one that will never be solved. Købke paints the presence of things—buildings, skies, faces—as the presence of enigma. Odd details like a portrait sitter's partly unbuttoned trousers or the cobwebs on the wall in a scruffy landscape are just there without emphasis, almost without implication. Having given himself without reserve to the transcription of the visible world, whose salient characteristic is that it is mostly never seen at all, his passionate receptivity to the look and feel of things evokes the inexpressible strangeness of the fact that they exist at all.

Unsurprisingly, when Købke's paintings do suggest literary meanings, these only generate new enigmas. The best example is another landscape, *View From Dosseringen Near the Sortedam Lake Looking Towards Nørrebro*, circa 1838, painted shortly before his departure for Italy. There is a self-conscious stateliness to this small, grave work that reminds us of the artist in control of the painting's mood, unlike the more spontaneous objectivity of *View From a Window*, but still that mood is dependent on his playing his cards close to his chest. At the lakeside, on a landing that projects into the middle of the picture, two women stand stolidly turned away toward a distant rowboat. No clue explains the underlying narrative; we can't even tell if they are watching the boat come or go. But the painting includes what for Købke seems a rather unusual allegorical flourish: the Danish flag flies from the pole on the landing. According to Jackson, preliminary sketches show that the flag was not originally present. So this scene of silent, inscrutable waiting was deliberately articulated as a painting of a national situation and not just, say, a family one. Or did the artist simply think the painting somehow needed a bit of bright red right there, the way the table next to the slouching Sødring needed a bright red box to set off the clear but sober tones of that portrait? In any case, the implicit appeal to nationalism seems to have worked, since *View From Dosseringen* became one of just two Købkes to enter the royal collection in his lifetime. But Jackson points out that as a royal emblem, unauthorized flying of the national flag had been banned four years earlier, so the motivation behind the purchase of the painting is ambiguous: "Whether the king was unable to live without it, or whether he sought to obscure it from public view, has generated some speculation." Even a symbol as seemingly self-evident as a flag becomes, under Købke's brush, an emblem of ambiguity.

Notoriously, Købke's correspondence gives as little indication of his intentions as the paintings do. But in 1836 he told a fellow painter, "I have been seriously thinking about what it is a painter should and can present by his means, and I come more and more to feel that we can only express ourselves, or at least I, in little sections assuming that I start out from the total impression of the painting, which we both agree is the right thing, only it all depends on the little sections being in the right place." Købke's discomfiture in expressing himself is evident, but reading forward through the subsequent history of art, one cannot help but think of the "little sensations" that Cézanne would later speak of, with equal obscurity, and then even of the way that the abstract and constructivist painters of the first half of the last century, Cézanne's children as they considered themselves, sought to build their own paintings from little interchangeable pieces—squares of red, yellow and blue, for instance—whose correctness was all in their placement. The greatest of those painters was Piet Mondrian, but Tate Modern has for once put the spotlight on his younger and more excitable colleague Theo van Doesburg. De Stijl was a movement named after the journal edited by van Doesburg to promote the modernist ideas he shared with Mondrian and a close-knit group of other artists, designers, architects and poets. With its matter-of-factness, orientation toward the domestic and elevation of self-limitation and judiciousness to the level of positive tasks, De Stijl painting can be seen as a sort of modernist Biedermeier, though energized by utopian aspirations that found a more sweeping articulation elsewhere, particularly in Russia. What everyone knows about van Doesburg is that he and Mondrian had a falling-out over the issue of diagonal lines in painting: van Doesburg was all for them, Mondrian declared them taboo, so it was palette knives at dawn. "Van Doesburg and the International Avant-Garde: Constructing a New World" is billed as the first major exhibition of the Dutch artist in Britain; there can't have been many anywhere outside Holland (where in fact the exhibition originated, at the Stedelijk Museum De Lakenhal in Leiden; it remains on view in London through May 16). It's a dense, scholarly effort accompanied by an inadequate catalog, and certainly this must be the first time van Doesburg has been treated on this scale. The exhibition features more than 400 works.

But is it really an exhibition of van Doesburg? By my count about 170 of the works are by him—a substantial number, to be sure, but "the International Avant-Garde" gets a lot more space. It's easy to see why the idea of exhibiting van Doesburg as part of his broader context would have appealed to the exhibition's curatorial team, led by Doris Wintgens Hötte of De Lakenhal and Gladys Fabre, an independent art historian and curator. For one thing, the fashion now among cultural historians is to highlight collaborative partnerships, coteries and social networks rather than the individual artist—even Shakespeare is starting to look more interesting as the nexus of a shifting group

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of collaborators than as an isolated genius. And it allows the Tate to advertise the show with the tag line "Mondrian, Brancusi, Arp and more." But one of the exhibition's real treats is rather the glimpses it offers of artists even more obscure than van Doesburg; my own new research topic is Marthe Donas, whom I'd never heard of but who may have been the first woman abstract painter. Her two works in the show are superb.

In van Doesburg's case, the contextual approach makes more sense than most. He was an inveterate networker, an enthusiastic joiner, an active participant in congresses and above all a recidivist founder of movements. He was "not so much…an artist in the strict sense," as Fabre admits, but "an instigator." He was quite capable of conjuring up a group out of just himself, inventing heteronyms, as Fernando Pessoa called them, to fill out his publications. As I.K. Bonset, he was a Dadaist; on occasion he became Aldo Camini. Even the name van Doesburg was a sort of heteronym for a man who at his birth in Utrecht in 1883 was called Christian Emil Marie Küpper.

There are artists who avoid writing about their work, feeling that their words can only betray an intuition that can be shown but not spoken, and Køpke was obviously one of them. Others, convinced that the eyes of others must be guided by language, write to justify their work. Van Doesburg was of a third type, not as common, though everyone in the art world knows one example: the artist who paints to justify his theorizing. But painting was only the half of it; van Doesburg was just as happy practicing typography, graphic design and architecture—more so, probably, since those activities allowed wider scope for his collaborative bent. Yet the extensive coverage of van Doesburg's connections can obscure the question of the exact nature of his artistic achievement. And I have to say I was surprised when I did that tally of the works, because the impression you get walking through the exhibition is that it contains even less of van Doesburg's work than it really does. His contribution is overshadowed without necessarily being weaker than the rest. Though van Doesburg's personality was mouthy and gregarious, his art has a strangely recessive quality, fading into the crowd a bit.

Still, for all the fruitfulness of his interdisciplinary peregrinations, van Doesburg was first and foremost a painter whose ventures into other practices were mostly rooted in response to pictorial issues and pictorial contexts. And it is as a painter that he never quite succeeded in finding himself.

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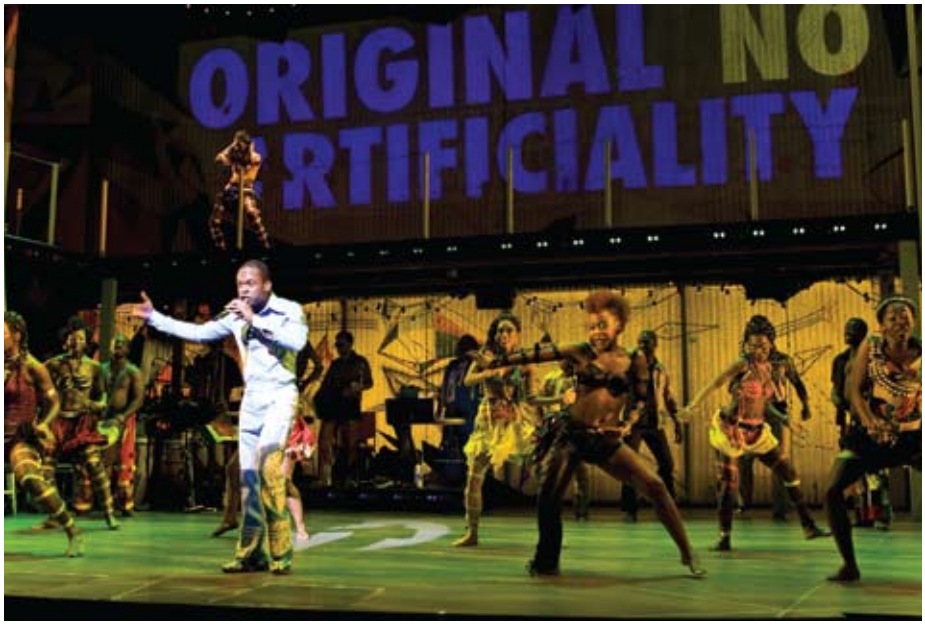
His early efforts to derive abstract compositions from figurative ones (*Composition IX, Opus 18: "Decomposition" of The Card Players*, 1917; *Composition VIII [The Cow]*, circa 1918) betray a deep uncertainty about the justification of abstract art. But instead of "purifying" the painting of superfluous elements, the process of abstracting from reality seems to leave these compositions stranded in their own sense of arbitrariness. Subsequently van Doesburg would attempt, with greater success, to give his paintings a simple mathematical basis—for instance in *Arithmetic Composition*, 1929-30—but this still seems makeshift, especially in comparison with Mondrian's acceptance of his own subjectivity. Yet the painter's description of what he had accomplished in *Arithmetic Composition* is not unjust: "My latest canvas, on which I have worked for a long time, is in black, white and grey: a structure that can be controlled, a *definite* surface without chance elements or individual caprice. Lacking in fantasy? Yes. Lacking in feeling? Yes. But not lacking in spirit, not lacking the universal and not, I think, empty as there is *everything* which fits the internal rhythm."

That lack of fantasy—an idealistically motivated search for objectivity—is what, for all the difference in their personalities and circumstances, makes van Doesburg one of Køpke's artistic descendants. But with van Doesburg it was self-imposed—his early efforts, influenced by Kandinsky, are cosmic fancies when not downright whimsical, as in *Girl With Buttercups*, 1914—while in his Dutch precursor the lack of fantasy was innate. Perhaps that's why the latter felt no need to eliminate from his painting the random combinations tossed off by life itself. Van Doesburg merely managed to elevate his individual caprice to a higher level, that of the overall plan of the work. What's lost is the perturbing detail that gives a painting a more intense liveliness. Other late paintings, admittedly, such as the elegantly off-balance *Simultaneous Counter-Composition*, 1930, suggest that this was not to have been van Doesburg's last word. But like Køpke, his efforts were cut off too soon; he was just 47 when he died of a heart attack in 1931. Soon his network too would fall into disarray as the "new Europe" he had hoped would rise from the ashes of World War I began to devour itself. "The next style will be first and foremost that of a free and peaceful life," van Doesburg predicted just before his death. That style has not yet appeared, but it is hard not to be touched by his embroiled and pugnacious efforts to make it possible. ■



MONIQUE CARBONI

Sahr Ngaujah as Fela Kuti and the Broadway cast of *Fela!*

The Most Happy Fela

by FRANKLIN BRUNO

At a one-off appearance at Lincoln Center last August, Mark Stewart (known as Stew), the star and co-author of the autobiographical musical *Passing Strange*, confronted what the title of that evening's performance had billed as "The Broadway Problem." Fortified by a horn section and guest vocalists, Stew and band led a pointed tour through musical theater's representations of African-Americans and their musical traditions, ranging from new rock-funk settings of DuBose Heyward and Ira Gershwin's Gullah-dialect lyrics for *Porgy and Bess* to damningly faithful renditions of songs from *Hair* ("Black Boys") and David Yazbek's 2000 adaptation of *The Full Monty* ("Big Black Man"), that trade on crude stereotypes about "raw" black male sexuality. (By contrast, the set also included a lively but respectful take on pioneering black vaudevillian Bert Williams's signature number, "Nobody.") Between songs, Stew mused on the success of the recently closed *Passing Strange*. The show placed "black people on Broadway," he emphasized, and after waiting a beat he added, in a sardonic falsetto, "*for a minute!*"

Leaving aside the remark's ungraciousness—*Passing Strange* managed a respectable five-month Broadway run, earning Drama Desk and Tony awards along the way—Stew's bitterness warrants neither full agreement nor an outright apologia. Whatever their creators' intentions, everything from *Porgy and Bess* and *Cabin in the Sky* to *Dreamgirls* might be dismissed as white appropriations of black speech and song, and shows based in gospel (*Your Arms Too Short to Box With God*) or jazz (*Ain't Misbehavin'*) as safe revivals of once-vital vernacular styles. Musicals about black life that fit neither of these categories have been rare and often short-lived (*Purlie*, inspired by a book of Ossie Davis's; Langston Hughes's *Simply Heavenly*), and while mixed-race and even colorblind casting are now common, many contemporary shows seem most interested in their black performers as vehicles for superhuman feats of vocal expressiveness. In 2006 Martin Short's not-quite-one-man *Fame Becomes Me* parodied the cliché of the soul- or gospel-styled "eleven o'clock number" in a song by *Hairspray* composer Marc Shaiman: "A Big Black Lady Stops the Show."

In some respects *Fela!*, a musical biography of the Nigerian bandleader, political dissident and anti-establishment icon Fela Anikulapo Kuti, mines this tradition. Notably, it finds time for "Rain," a thunderous second-act showcase number for the ghost of the hero's mother, composed by the

Franklin Bruno is the author of Elvis Costello's Armed Forces *(Continuum).*

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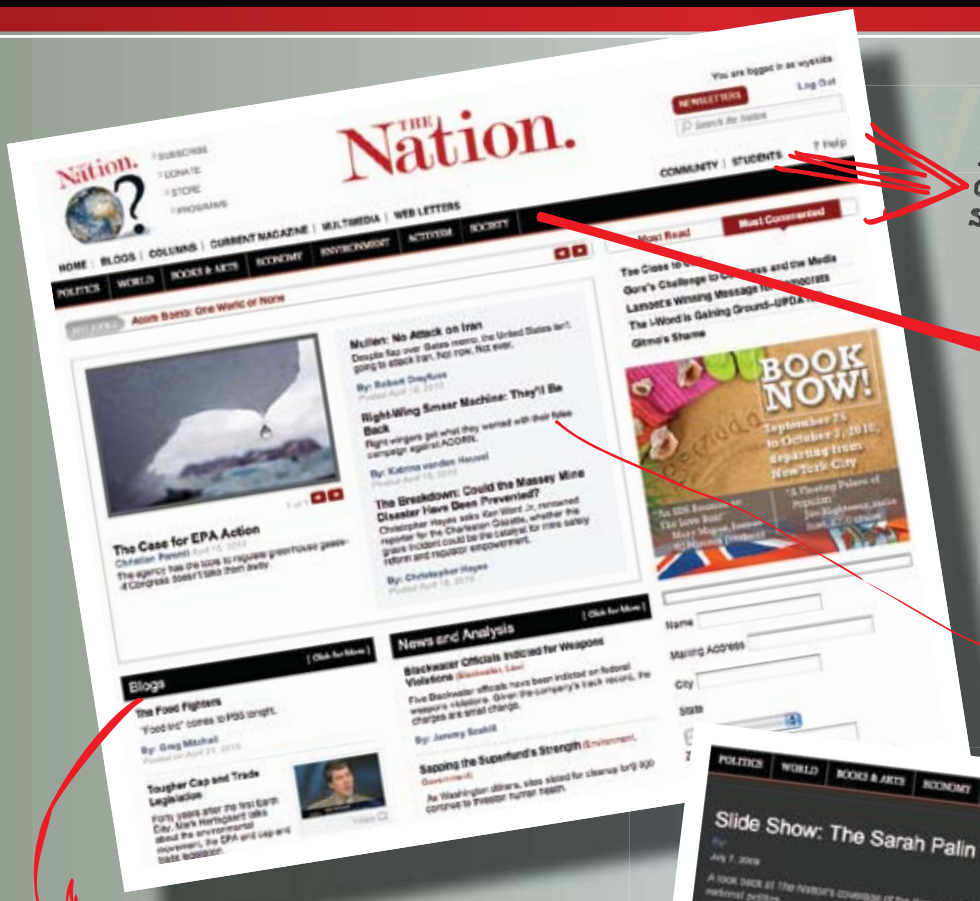

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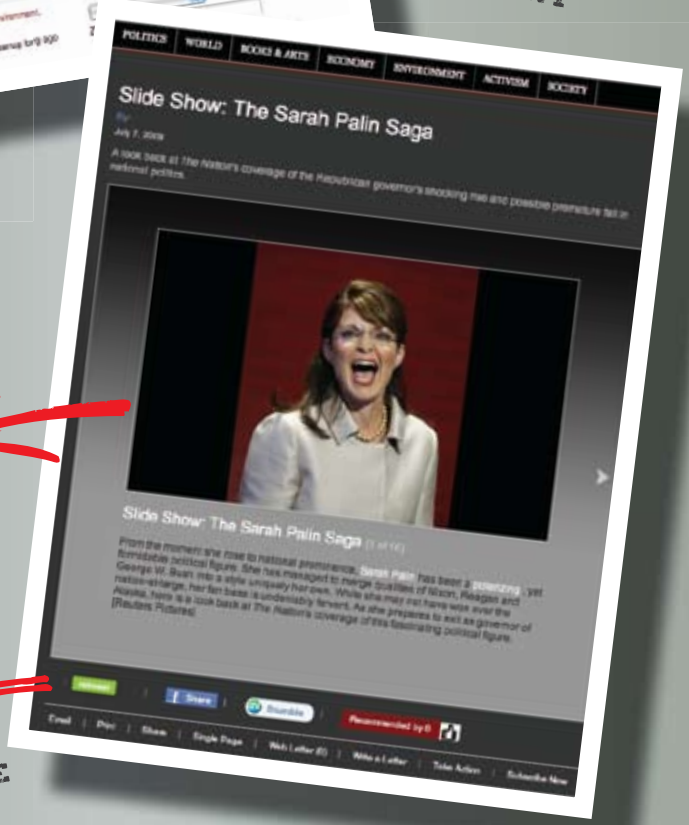

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show's musical director, Aaron Johnson, and trumpeter Jordan MacLean. But otherwise the show tells Fela's story through his own music, and although its setting and protagonist are African, not African-American, it lacks for representation of neither. A focus of its first act is the crucial influence on Fela of a 1968-69 sojourn in Los Angeles, where he encountered Black Power politics and its accompanying soundtrack of funk and modal jazz. There are no speaking parts for white characters in the show; the demanding lead role is played at alternate performances by Sahr Ngaujah, a Sierra Leonean, and Kevin Mambo, a Canadian of Zimbabwean descent. The production's only nonblack faces are found among its musicians, drawn from Antibalas, New York's foremost exponents of Afrobeat, the musical style Fela invented and named. The multiracial band remains onstage for most of the show, not precisely "acting" but interacting with its protagonist and, functionally, portraying Afrika 70, Fela's most celebrated ensemble.

Fela! awkwardly negotiates Broadway by trying to balance propaganda with extravaganza.

Directed and choreographed by Bill T. Jones, *Fela!*, whose Broadway run began in November at the Eugene O'Neill Theater, appears poised to last longer than a minute. Even Stew might be heartened by the show's reception, given the relatively limited concessions the show's creators have made to the large segment of its potential audience more attuned to Stephen Sondheim's wit or Stephen Schwartz's shmaltz. Many lyrics are sung in the mix of Yoruba, nonstandard English and Lagos street slang that is as characteristic of Fela's sound as its hocketed horn lines and interlocking guitar figures. (Some translated lyrics, and those to "Rain," are by Jim Lewis, Jones's co-writer.) The show begins *in medias res*, with the band working through a groove-in-progress as the audience finds its seats; the overarching conceit is that we have walked into one of Fela's regular appearances at The Shrine, the serially relocated Lagos nightclub at which he held court. We soon learn that the concert is Fela's first in several months and, he pledges, his last in Nigeria. The setting is summer 1978, some time after a major raid by military police on the Kalakuta Republic, the compound where Fela lived communally with his musicians, dancers and entourage, many of whom were beaten or raped in the attack. His mother, in her late 70s, was thrown from a second-story window, suffering injuries that hastened her death.

The loose show-within-a-show structure allows for extensive flashbacks and a second-act descent into the spirit world so that the protagonist may seek permission from his mother, now an *orisha*, or ancestor spirit, to pursue a safe and lucrative "world music" career abroad. It also means that no dramatic excuse is required for the ensemble to break into a number, or for Fela to break the fourth wall. (*Hedwig and the Angry Inch* used much the same format.) On record and especially live, Fela salted his music with *yabis*—extended spoken rants—about his country and continent's socio-political ills, illustrated by anecdotes of daily life in Lagos. *Fela!* follows suit: one of his first addresses to the audience is, "Africans, listen to me as Africans; non-Africans, listen with an open mind." This invocation leads into "Everything Scatter," from 1975, which grounds broad charges ("This country no work") in a bus conductor's threat to drive his squabbling passengers straight to the police station. (Buses, roads and Lagos's ubiquitous traffic jams—"go-slows"—were Fela's favored metonyms for Nigeria's infrastructural woes.)

It's a terrific song, and a representative one. Other key numbers—the antimilitaristic "Zombie," the anticorporate "I.T.T. (International Thief Thief)"—are equally well-chosen examples of Fela's standing themes, and of the sounds that gave them life. That said, *Fela!* is an awkward attempt to negotiate Broadway convention by balancing propaganda with extravaganza. Extended passages of *yansh*-shaking by dancers of both sexes (*yansh* can mean both "bass" and "booty") inevitably raise the specter of the exoticized black body that has haunted the New York stage since Orson Welles's WPA-era "voodoo *Macbeth*"—though it should be said that Fela's actual performances, and the cultural politics underpinning them, could be no less discomfiting. More significant, the show foregrounds the liberatory and populist sides of Fela's politics while downplaying the tendentious and reactionary aspects of his idiosyncratic brand of pan-Africanism, to say nothing of the dogmatic streak that was as integral to his character and ideas as his genuine concern for his country and its people. That "Africans, listen to me…" introduction, for instance, is drawn from the somewhat later song "Shuffering and Shmiling," which exhorts all Africans to reject both Christianity and Islam in favor of traditional religion. There is little point in simply knocking Jones and his collaborators for their selective approach to Fela's life and career; without selection and emphasis, biography, musical or otherwise, would not be possible. But recognizing this shouldn't make us any less uneasy about some of the choices they have made.

Fela was born Olufela Olusegun Oludotun Ransome-Kuti in 1938, in Nigeria's predominantly Yoruban southwestern region; his hometown of Abeokuta, sixty miles from Lagos, was founded by Egba settlers in 1830. The English half of his surname was that adopted by his paternal grandfather, the Rev. Canon Josiah Ransome-Kuti, whose Christian hymns in the indigenous language were some of the first music by an African to be recorded in England. Fela's parents, Israel Oludotun and Frances Abigail Olufunmilayo Thomas Ransome-Kuti ("Funmilayo"), accepted Anglicanism but chafed at colonial domination in other ways. His father resisted English oversight of the grammar school of which he was principal, while Funmilayo became a champion of African women's rights. Her political influence peaked in the late 1940s, when demonstrations she organized led to the ouster of Abeokuta's tax-hungry *alake* (roughly, a kind of mayor), whose power had swelled with the crown's backing. Funmilayo's subsequent attempts to found an opposition party foundered, but she commanded respect from international feminists and socialists, and her activism was a model for her son's.

Like his two brothers, Fela was sent to London to study medicine, though he probably intended to change his allegiance to music all along. He studied trumpet and composition at Trinity College; his encounters with saxophonist Joe Harriott and other fixtures of the city's Afro-Caribbean jazz scene were strictly extracurricular. With childhood friend J.K. Braimah, then in London to study law, he formed Koola Lobitos—Spanish for "little wolves" preceded by "cool"-sounding nonsense. Fela returned to Lagos in 1963, on fire to play progressive jazz, but he quickly reoriented toward "highlife," the amalgam of colonial dance-band arrangements and Afro-Cuban and indigenous rhythms that was the dance

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music of choice for urbane West Africans. (Confusingly, highlife is also the name of a somewhat distinct guitar-based style, one of many under the wider "Afropop" umbrella.) Koola Lobitos's mid-1960s recordings, recently reissued by Knitting Factory Records, offer early evidence of Fela's sophistication as a horn arranger but few hints of his future musical and political radicalism. During an era that included the early years of postcolonial government and the stirrings of Nigeria's costly war of suppression against secessionist Biafra, Fela was content to sing, "It's highlife time…jump for joy at the swinging club."

Koola Lobitos's success was modest. Highlife's popularity among the young was soon challenged by the imported soul of James Brown and Wilson Pickett, whose repertory and stagecraft became staples of regionally based "copyright," or cover, bands. In 1968 an impatient Fela took the band to New York City on the wager that American notoriety would impress Africans on his return. The band soon fetched up in Los Angeles, where, dogged by money and visa troubles, their stay was extended for months. Though as yet unpoliticized, Fela was booked at an NAACP function, where he met Sandra Smith (later Sandra Iszadore), a computer science student with Black Panther ties. They became lovers, and it was through Smith that Fela received an education in Malcolm X, Angela Davis and, on the musical side, Nina Simone and the post-bop explorations of Miles Davis and John Coltrane. (As drummer Tony Allen later recalled, the band also got a lesson in Afrocentric sartorial tastes: "We all wore suits still, and all the African people in LA were into African clothes.") Fela was soon exploring connections between the most formally exciting African-American music of the period, the catchiness and showiness of highlife, and the rhythmic density and extended durations common in precolonial African musics. Though Fela had coined the label "Afrobeat" on an earlier tour of Ghana, and refined the style over the next decade, it was in America that he first made music that merited the name.

The Fela of legend emerged rapidly upon his return to Lagos in 1970. Establishing a nightclub called Afro-Spot (a precursor to The Shrine), the renamed Africa 70 released the first recordings of its revamped sound, including a measurably funkier reworking of Koola Lobitos's Latin-styled "Wayo." Fela began to cut an outsized figure—performing in sleek jumpsuits embroidered with Yoruba glyphs, cultivating a deserved reputation for sexual promiscuity and flouting Nigeria's strict marijuana laws with his immense onstage spliffs (the modest prop joint used in the show is dwarfed by those seen in actual performance photos). By mid-decade, he was the country's most popular musician, as the countercultural energies around his home and club near the Mushin slum district magnetized youth and scandalized authorities. Still, his songs were rarely political in the narrowest sense: though many dealt concretely with class inequality and the perils of Westernization and urbanization in the wake of Nigeria's "oil dream," their criticism of the powers that be was largely implicit.

A 1974 drug raid led to Fela's arrest; he was released after swallowing the planted evidence and defecating it while in custody. Emboldened, he told the tale in the rush-released "Expensive Shit" and "Alagbon Close," named for Lagos's central police station. Within a year, he dropped his "colo" surname for Anikulapo—"he who carries death in his pouch"—and symbolically declared his compound the independent Kalakuta Republic. Except for a brief respite during the relatively benign presidency of Gen. Murtala Mohammed, assassinated in 1976, Fela was constantly in and out of prison, where he was frequently beaten, on a variety of trumped-up charges. When he was free to make his music, it grew sharper and wilder, and his lyrics became more strident, sweeping and incisive, excoriating graft, corruption and abuse of power by the country's successive military governments, with their corporate and imperialist ties and their unconcern for Nigeria's urban underclass, for whom the country's economic growth was little more than a rumor.

It was in America that Fela first made music that merited the 'Afrobeat' label.

Fela's music, and the broad outline of his career, are not unfamiliar to informed American hip-hop and rock audiences. But even though the repertory of musical theater has expanded to include the Abba, Four Seasons and Green Day songbooks, it is hard to think of a musical style with less apparent affinity with the Broadway show tune than Afrobeat. The obvious problem is one of duration. On record, a typical Africa 70 track runs between eight and seventeen minutes; in concert, any given selection could swell to a half-hour, the better to support dancing, instrumental solos and the leader's *yabis*.

Michael Veal, Fela's least credulous and most musically informed biographer in English, has usefully mapped the format common to his reputation-making 1970s compositions. Most build a rhythm section groove gradually, from two (sometimes three) interlocking guitar parts, congas and other percussion, and eventually bass guitar and Tony Allen's kit drumming. (From Koola Lobitos until his departure in 1978, Allen was the outstanding exception to the relative anonymity of Fela's sidemen.) Some meandering, modal improvisation from Fela on trumpet, sax or electric keyboard follows, leading into composed horn ostinatos and more focused soloing from one or more players. What Veal terms the "vocal song" consists of one or two verses and an insistent call-and-response between Fela and his backing singers. Many tracks end with another, briefer solo from Fela, a restatement of the main horn figures and ensemble endings derived from soul-revue arrangements and the big-band side of highlife.

Fela's musical discipline was the flip side of his libertine lifestyle, and it owed much to the examples of such autocratic bandleaders as Victor Olaiya ("The Evil Genius of Highlife") and James Brown, as well as to his Western training. In contrast to some other rhythm-based musical practices, African, African-American and otherwise, the underpinnings of a given Fela composition are not interchangeable vamps but belong to them as much as their horn lines or lyrics; their elements, especially the guitar parts, allow little compass for improvisation. The arrangements in the show are at pains to preserve these relationships; their main departure lies in trimming solos and introductions, though these are still lengthy enough to support Jones's choreography and preserve the overall character of the music. Purists may balk, but even a truncated "Coffin for Head of State" is not easily mistaken for "Some Enchanted Evening."

Assessing the show's representation of Afrobeat's cultural and political context, and the character of its prime mover, is more difficult. Some of the production's troubling features reflect, intentionally or not, tensions in Fela's career and self-presentation.

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Does the show sometimes feel like a one-character affair, with even Sandra Izadore and Funmilayo presented as memories or ghosts? Yes, but such shadowboxing seems to have been part of Fela's persona. Charitably, one might say that individual relationships were less important to his self-understanding than his collective one with Nigerian (and by extension, African) society. Is there something jarring about the juxtaposition of a brief but sobering scene of Fela's torture by a mirror-shaded general and the kinetic, infectious staging of "Zombie" that follows? Yes, but recall that Fela adorned several album covers with photographs of his wounded face and body, an iconography that suggests how deadly serious matters were given public expression in his art.

Certain distortions, however, are the fault of the production alone, which often proceeds as if Fela's worst quality was that he was occasionally touchy with his band mates and entourage. A case in point is its treatment of Fela's mass marriage, in February 1978, to twenty-seven dancers and other members of his entourage. It is not clear why this event, too sensational and well-known to be omitted entirely, is set immediately before the Kalakuta raid, rather than slightly after, when it actually occurred; what is clear is that, inasmuch as it conflicts with a simplistic depiction of Fela as a free- but right-thinking progressive on all fronts, Jones and Lewis would rather not have dealt with it at all. Though the sequence registers the wedding's role as a publicity stunt (flashbulbs pop, Fela grins), the staging is hasty, even apologetic, with Ngaujah or Mambo (I have seen both) at his most ingratiating. We are not told that Fela's justification of the episode appealed to traditional African practices, though this may have been so much strategic essentialism, or that the marriages were of doubtful legal and religious validity, as many of his contemporaries understood. Jones and Lewis appear to be nervous about the wrong thing, because they assume their audience will be: if Fela's domestic and sexual arrangements were ethically disturbing, it is not primarily because he was pleased to shock polite Nigeria and serve his ego by calling them "marriages." (Some coverage of the show has abetted this massaging of the material; a *New York Times* profile of the cast piously describes the research done by its nine female dancers into their real-life models, though as far as the audience can see, their individuation amounts to a gesture here, a haughty look there.)

Fela!'s most misleading omissions stem from the decision to halt the action in the immediate aftermath of the Kalakuta raid, when as an act of protest Fela laid a coffin symbolizing that of his mother on the steps of the presidential palace. The ensuing years found him beleaguered and radicalized, especially after the near-fatal beatings he endured during a 1981 prison term. Africa 70 dissolved, succeeded by the larger and sometimes ill-rehearsed Egypt 80. Fela's music of this period is fascinatingly complex but more somber in tone—and far less accessible. While his critical stance remained vigorous, and increasingly global in scope, its underlying pan-Africanism assumed a mystical, "Black Egypt"–influenced cast, according to which, for example, the source of Western technology is a "power pot" stolen from Yorubaland by English explorers. One finds similar imagery in the work of Sun Ra and George Clinton, but Fela's intermittent forays into electoral politics make his mysticism harder to swallow. Whatever the power of these ideas as metaphors for the expropriation of African wealth and labor, they are not the most practical tools for contending with the region's twentieth- and twenty-first-century problems.

Fela! struggles to solve its "Broadway problem"—and earn its exclamation point—by ending on a note of forced uplift, as a final supertitle informs us that Fela died in 1997, never abandoning Nigeria. This is true, as far as it goes, though Fela also toured internationally and retreated to Ghana during periods of political and financial strain. That his death was the result of AIDS-related complications goes unmentioned; this might not be significant were it not for his own stubborn denials that an African man could contract this "whiteman's disease." Given the scale of the AIDS epidemic in the very regions where Fela's fame and influence were greatest, such disavowals amount to a slide from personal and cultural pride to public irresponsibility. (It fell to Fela's brother Olikoye Ransome-Kuti, then Nigeria's leading health official, to confirm the truth after Fela's death.) One can sympathize with the show's creators' wish to respect their protagonist's achievements as an artist and symbol of resistance—as well as the valid and still-resonant elements of his rebukes to power. But by ignoring many of his failings, they show a less excusable reluctance to allow their audience to distinguish for itself among the man, his music and its message. ■

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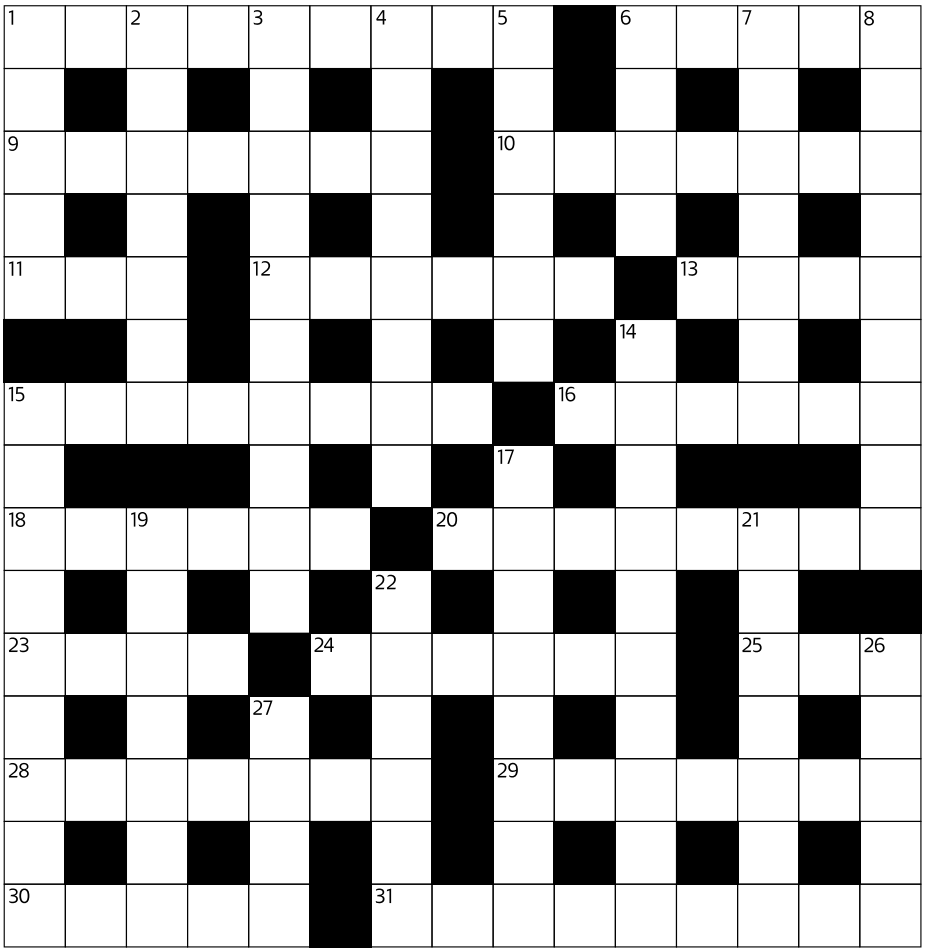

ACROSS

1 and **20** From 15 down to what one might put on the table, this is very complete. (4,5,2,6)

6 One version of early Irish writing. (Go back to an early Biblical character to find it.) (5)

9 They shouldn't properly be business trips. (7)

10, **11** and **15** down Good advice with a story of a leader of Israel during Genesis, perhaps. (5,2,3,9)

12 Class might be wearing, but not so much as before. (6)

13 Indian dance, colloquially, with one. (4)

15 What might be found in the ring (in spectator sport) and in the middle (in active game) might be one jump ahead of you. (8)

16 Could it be more pure, in a sense, and still wither the possible outgrowth? (6)

18 See 25

20 See 1 across

23 Bill, you might take more than one during the 12! (4)

24 You might look for logs in them, or perhaps more finished wood for furniture. (6)

25 and **18** Make a sort of joke in kindly (though biting) fashion. (9)

28 A form of element is nothing to drink to excess! (7)

29 Probably not boarding if you're just doing this. (7)

30 23 found on the bank might be this on back. (5)

31 See 1 down

DOWN

1 and **31** A demand for the appearance of only a middling facade? (5,3,6)

2 Nothing at breakfast, for example, but this? (7)

3 Not where the IRS keeps its "Married and Filing Jointly" returns, as you might follow. (6,4)

4 One might dictate what your taxes will be. (8)

5 and **19** A questionable stage line? (2,2,2,3,2,2)

6 One probably has to be indulgent with this. (4)

7 Shakers probably have one, for the sake of charity. (7)

8 She's the boss in the family! (9)

14 Daisy-type apart, it might be a supermarket. (5,5)

15 See 10 across

17 Caught, familiarly, with a ring around the neck. (8)

19 See 5

21 It's probably only an impression, but they say it's one way to bestow a kiss. (7)

22 Is whipped cream a thing to take a shot with? (6)

26 A very long reign broken in Africa? (5)

27 A couple of movies were this yesterday, and free. (4)

This puzzle originally appeared in the May 20, 1978, issue.

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 1249

C	A	B	I	N	E	T	M	A	K	E	R	S		
A		I		E		U		L		L		U		S
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B	L	U	E	S		H	E	A	D	A	C	H	E	S
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